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# VISIONS OF THE END

A STORY IN DANIEL  
AND REVELATION

## VISIONS OF THE END

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# VISIONS OF THE END

A STUDY IN DANIEL  
AND REVELATION

BY

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TO  
MY WIFE



## Preface

I WAS trained in the school which taught that apocalypse is the product of late Judaism and of a time when men were conscious of the distance between God and the world and were also conscious of their utter inability to do anything to set a sorely hurt world right. As such, apocalypse was born of despair and pessimism and an enfeebled sense of the divine grace. But here a question insistently pressed for an answer. Jesus, who not only believed in the fatherhood of God toward sinful men, but was even able to teach that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without the Father, made a constant and liberal use of apocalyptic language and ideas. The extent of His use of such language may have been exaggerated—this remains a question for New Testament scholars—but of the fact there can be no doubt. And the fact suggested the need for a revision of the commonly received estimate of apocalypse.

This book contains a modest effort to explain why Jesus, who struck back behind legal Judaism to the thought of Hosea and Jeremiah, could also use the language of apocalypse. He could use it, because apocalypse was the continuation of prophecy. I call the book a modest effort, not from any false humility, but because the limits of this series have made it impossible to supply the detailed proofs which are needed, and in particular have ruled out any reference to the extra-canonical apocalypses. Perhaps, however, the popular form in which the subject is treated may help some who have felt it difficult to understand certain features in their Lord's teaching. If it helps even a few to understand Him better, the labour it has cost will not have been wasted.

## Preface

The limits of the book have also made it impossible to do more than hint at another matter which deserves attention. I believe it capable of proof that cataclysm and immediate intervention by God are not essential to the apocalyptic scheme of thought. DANIEL and REVELATION, however, which alone are dealt with here, undoubtedly teach both ; and it would have been intolerable to devote space to a subject which is absent from the authors with whom this volume professes to deal. But it seems clear to me that some of the prophets were moving or even had moved to the thought of evolution rather than that of cataclysm. What the apocalyptic conception as to immediate intervention meant to these men was that the eternal order was at hand—there was a door open into Heaven always. With this view goes the recognition that we have not the right to conclude from certain of our Lord's words to His belief in an instant cataclysmic revolution.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to Dr. J. H. Leckie for his help in connection with this book. Dr. Leckie, whose knowledge of apocalyptic literature is only equalled by his fine insight into its spirit, has read my MS. and kept me from many mistakes. But he has also given many suggestions which have been fruitful and an encouragement which was inspiring. Perhaps the greatest encouragement he gave was that his unsparing but always generous criticism of the MS. made its writer feel that the work was worth such close attention.

A.C.W.

New College,  
Edinburgh,  
*March, 1922.*

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# I

## INTRODUCTORY



## CHAPTER I

### Apocalypse : Its Difficulty

APOCALYPSE is a difficult subject in any circumstances ; but in connection with a series of volumes under the general heading of the Humanism of the Bible, it presents peculiar difficulty. For the interest of the present series is not mainly in the dogmatic contents of Scripture, or in its teaching as to the nature of God and His relation to the world and to men. Its aim is rather to show how closely the successive books of Scripture were related to the thought and life of the period in which each of them was produced, and to point out how, being the product and the expression of the spiritual and moral aspirations of men, they can still foster and deepen these aspirations. Now it cannot but be felt that the two books of Scripture which are here chosen as typical of the apocalyptic attitude accept ultimately a view of God's relation to the world, and therefore expect direct intervention of God in the world, about which many Christian men to-day feel more or less clearly that it is not their own. So far as they occupy this position, the books do not seem to relate themselves to the mind of the Church at all, but to embody a conception from which the Church has definitely passed.

The result is the somewhat anomalous position which the books called apocalyptic occupy in the mind of the modern Church. It is probably not unjust to say that

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the Church selects from them certain passages which it finds itself able to use with profit but which are generally the passages with least distinctively apocalyptic colouring, while it passes by the fundamental attitude to the future which the books occupy. Many men, if they think on the subject, must acknowledge that the weird apocalyptic visions present no appeal to them, not merely because of the oriental imagery in which they are clothed, but because of the expectations as to the future which they contain and the view of God's relation to the world which these express. Thus every one knows the sweet, solemn cadences of the great utterances in Revelation as to immortality, which have so often been read beside or over our dead that they have become part of our thought about the future and the eternal world. Most ministers, too, were in the habit of preaching a series of sermons on the messages to the seven Churches of Asia, and many of them found themselves able to lecture with profit on the incidents of Daniel's life in Babylon. But these were precisely the sections of the two books, which were least significant for the fundamental positions of both: they were rather felt to be closely related to the life from which they had taken their origin, and could be again related to present-day conditions and needs. But the situation was wholly changed, as soon as men turned to the bowls and trumpets of John, or to the beast-kingdoms of Daniel. Sometimes, it is true, both preachers and readers have succeeded, as it were, in sinking shafts into certain isolated sections of the book of Revelation and have seemed to see light on these. But often the principles which had given them guidance in the interpretation of the bowls did not help them at all in the effort to understand the woman clothed

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with the sun or the two witnesses. There emerged no connected scheme according to which they were able to interpret the book as a whole, or which would apply equally to every part. As for the beasts of Daniel, these often appeared to refer so patently to purely secular and political history that it was difficult to relate them to any spiritual principles at all.

It is true that certain sections of the Christian Church do find a peculiar interest in precisely these more difficult passages, because they are able to believe that in them is to be found a sketch of the future course of the world's destiny and the Church's fate. They experience a mental and spiritual exhilaration in discovering by their help the things which are to come to pass in the latter times on the earth. But it may not be incorrect to say that an increasing number of Christian men feel that so to interpret the books is to allow themselves to think of the divine knowledge very much along the line of their finite knowledge, and is to believe that God's great wisdom concerns itself with, and goes out of its way twice in the world's history to inform men about, matters in which they may be deeply interested rather than about the matters in which the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ so patiently seeks to interest His children. They observe too that the Master, when He is said to have declared that the precise period of these times and seasons was hidden even from Him, must be supposed by those who reported His mind to have pronounced that undue curiosity about them was at least unprofitable. And when they observe how Jesus Himself did not hesitate to use language of a distinctly apocalyptic character, they are only the more strongly convinced that such teaching could not have been intended to gratify



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curiosity, however natural, but must have had for Him another meaning. Yet they are left puzzled as to what the meaning could be, and only the more puzzled, because they cannot grasp how Jesus could speak in such terms at all. Why does His Church find it difficult to use the language its Master could employ?

The result of all this is that men are content to relegate these mysterious books to students and specialists, and, while using certain selected passages, acknowledge practically that the others do not relate themselves any longer to the living conscience and thought of their own time. They seem to be something which the course of Christian thought has passed and flung aside on its onward road.

Yet there are several facts which are fitted to give thoughtful men pause, and to make them hesitate before adopting so drastic a method with all this literature. The first is the peculiar richness of much of the thought amid a great deal which unquestionably puzzles and confuses the reader. And this fine and high thought concerns itself with one ultimate question, *viz.*, the final destiny of the individual soul. It is significant that apocalypse in the Old Testament<sup>1</sup> broke through the Hebrew silence as to the future life with a definite utterance on personal immortality, and that it is to a New Testament Apocalypse that we owe those great, grave utterances which have passed into the perennial use of the Church in the presence of death, and which have consoled more troubled hearts than any other words in literature. John bewilders his

<sup>1</sup> I prefer to put the matter in this way rather than to say in Daniel, because Daniel is only one apocalypse out of many, and because immortality is not confined to Daniel.



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readers, as he passes from his crashing trumpets and streaming bowls to describe the red dragon which vomited a flood out of its mouth, but he has comforted the Church in all its mourning generations and has been able to turn its sorrow into triumph. The mighty music of his unforced sentences comes back to stay up the hearts of men, when they are most intimately threatened with defeat. When a man could write : " They shall hunger no more neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," it is idle to represent him as aloof from the needs and aspirations of men, nor can anything else he writes be readily pronounced negligible. And what is significant about the literature in both cases is that it ends on the same note, and that the note on which it ends is not merely a note of triumph, but one of spiritual triumph. For it is the victory of the soul which has endured and has not denied the Name, about which both write with such quiet assurance.

It might be possible to say that this is merely accidental, that all it means is that the writer succeeded here and there in escaping from the close atmosphere of his weird visions into the freer air of Christian thought. In reality in both the Old and the New Testaments the position of the writers on immortality is integrally related to their other fundamental convictions, those very convictions which make their apocalypses difficult. I must return to the question later, and be content to point it out here. To apocalypse the value of human personality is due to the fact that the feeble human soul, in spite of all opposing

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influence, is able, alone in creation, to come into relation to the personal God and to order its life by His unchanging and supreme will. In the fulness of time God will renew His whole creation, He will break in upon the order of the world to make a new world in which dwells righteousness. When He does this and transforms His creation, He will take up into the new order the souls which, through all the seductions of sense and time, have not denied the order which is beyond sense and above time, but have exercised the patience of the saints. When He renews the world from its disorder, He will rescue the souls of the faithful from the ignominy and defeat of death. They shall be declared for what they are, those who have overcome through the Name.

But there is another consideration which may well give us pause, before we surrender the apocalyptic writings. Not only do the two books chosen here to represent the movement reach a clear view on immortality, but they spring from two generations which were called to undergo a real travail of soul. In the time of both the world was in desperate confusion and the men of good will were few in number and unconsidered. In the case of the Revelation the book was the product not merely of the spiritual travail of a generation, but of a generation which had been roused by the challenge, and awed by the grandeur, of Jesus Christ. As such, these writings should have their special interest to all who take the attitude assumed by the "Humanism of the Bible" series. For they are not the casual product of the human mind, or even the outcome of its effort to think sincerely about the universe in which it finds itself. They are the product of the definitely religious spirit, struggling to assert itself in an untoward

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universe, and seeking to express for its comfort and strength the hopes and the faith which enabled it to maintain itself above the flux and change of a world which was even more indifferent than usual to the summons of spiritual realities. The human soul, in conflict with a difficult time, was declaring how it found its nurture and its victory in the certainties of the eternal world. This feature, which characterises the apocalypses, becomes only the more significant, when it is recognised for whom the books were written and in what circles they were chiefly valued. Thus John evidently wrote his Revelation for the encouragement of the ordinary Church-members of Asia Minor. Daniel is not a Maccabee or priestly pamphlet, *i.e.*, it is not the outcome of any of the leading sects which guided the Jewish mind in the period of Antiochus. Neither Daniel nor any of its fellow-apocalypses seems ever to have been welcome to the professional schools. Now the religious material, which takes its rise from among the common people and which finds its chief circulation among them, has often grave weaknesses and limitations. It is frequently clumsily expressed ; it is generally illogical and an offence to the systematic theologian ; it is always apt to be highly coloured to the point of crudity. But it rarely fails to show one characteristic which atones for much that is faulty. It relates itself to the life which the men who produce it and the men who value it are actually living, and to the work they are being required to do. The religion of such men in all its products is never a mere side-issue or interesting intellectual exercise which evaporates in conferences. The men believe in it, because it is helping them to endure and to act ; they have little time or patience for anything else. And, because they



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look for, and find in their religion a help both to endure and to act, they always lay great emphasis on the definitely religious motives and hopes. What God can do and will do is their leading note ; and what they themselves can do or are required to do is always the direct outcome of something which they believe about God, and which gives them courage or guidance or comfort in the difficulty or uncertainty of their life. Whatever else the books may be, they are religious through and through, for they begin and end with God.

It is possible to speak generally about the circles in which this kind of literature circulated, because the two books here dealt with do not stand alone, but are representative of a much wider class with a similar character. Since there are grave differences of opinion among students as to what exactly constitutes apocalypse, the period to which it should be assigned cannot be precisely defined. But every one will probably allow that, between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D., there was a singular outburst of books and pamphlets bearing this common characteristic. Evidently there was something in the religious life of those particular centuries which called for, and could fruitfully use, religious thought of this nature. But what makes this fact more significant to Christian students is to observe how many apocalyptic writings, though produced in Judaism and bearing the stamp of its distinctive thought, were more carefully preserved and more highly valued by the Church than by the community in which they took their origin. Not merely have the book of Revelation and the Synoptic Gospels incorporated passages which have been borrowed from the Jews, but the majority of the other Jewish apocalypses have only survived, because they were taken

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over and used by the Christian communities. In several cases it seems proved that the original texts were in Hebrew or Aramaic, which were then translated for the use of the scattered Jews of the diaspora, but which have only reached us in the form into which they were translated for the local Christian Churches. We possess the Apocalypse of Baruch in its Syriac form, the book of Enoch in its entirety has only reached us in Ethiopic. Now the fact that these were first translated at all and were then preserved in their Christian dress proves that they appealed to and were found helpful by the rising Christian communities, while they died out in the Jewish Church. What makes this more remarkable is that the Christians did not take over indiscriminately everything of this nature which the Jews had to offer. There are a number of apocalypses of which we know nothing except the names ; and it is a legitimate inference that they died, because the Church could not use them and because the Synagogue which had produced them did not know what to do with them. Nor was the Church content to take over a number of the Jewish apocalypses, for it produced, in addition to our book of Revelation, several apocalypses of its own. The well-known Shepherd of Hermas, both in spirit and in form, belongs to this type of literature ; and there once existed Apocalypses of Paul, of Peter and of Thomas.

One thing seems clear from the situation thus sketched, *viz.*, that literature of this class answered to some need in the religious life of the period in which it so richly flourished. But it further appears clear that the religious life which produced and could use apocalypse found its home more readily in the Church than in the Synagogue. The Church, too, continued to write apocalypses for some time after

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the Synagogue had ceased to produce them. What this seems to suggest is that apocalypse took its origin from and chiefly appealed to precisely that section of Jewish opinion which was carried out of its original home to form one of the main factors in the nascent Church. The men brought with them not only their Hebrew Bibles, but their Jewish apocalypses, and could use both. There was an element in the Christian position which was more akin to apocalypse, than the official Synagogue became.

It may be said that the attitude of the Synagogue to this whole type of thought was strongly influenced and even determined by the fact that the apocalypses were largely concerned with the Messianic hope and so were capable of being appealed to in proof of the claims of Jesus to be the promised Messiah. The teachers of Judaism may have naturally discouraged all the literature which was capable of so dangerous an interpretation. Whether the Christians would have set much store by proof as to Jesus being Messiah taken from the non-canonical books may however be questioned. Certainly even the Gospels which borrow from Jewish apocalypses prefer to take proofs of Jesus having satisfied the Messianic claims from the accepted books of the Old Testament. Besides, if the Synagogue had been suspicious of the apocalypses merely because of their Messianic references, its leaders might have been content to draw a distinction, and, while rejecting the books which were tolerant of a Christian interpretation, might have been expected to retain the peculiarly Jewish productions. The fact that no distinction was made and that with the rise of Christianity an end came to the writing of Jewish apocalypses points rather to the large change which came over the whole temper of



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Judaism after the convulsions in it which attended the rise of Christianity. For the Synagogue was not left unaffected by its breach with the Church any more than the Roman Church was left unaffected by its breach with Protestantism. It is as unhistorical in the one case as in the other to ignore the powerful reaction which resulted from the breach. When Christianity, that portentous phenomenon, was born of Judaism and had been roughly expelled, the severely legal attitude finally won the upper hand among the Jewish leaders, and Judaism became Rabbinism. The Jew became more sure that God could be mediated only through the forms and traditions of the past, because he had cast out the men within his own communion who stood for the reality of an immediate intercourse between God and man, and a direct intervention of God in this world. Official Judaism ceased to expect the transformation of life from some free surrender to God's will and from any free action on the part of God. Only what was prescribed must find place now in the careful life of the community. What had largely held Jewry together during its exile, the sense that, while unable to take actual part in the sacrificial worship, it must maintain its fitness to take part in that worship, had become its religion.

To official Judaism help from God or from anywhere else could only come through the observance of a series of Church regulations ; apocalypse, on the other hand, stood for the reality of the direct and immediate intervention of God in human affairs. Now the type of religion which believes in conversion or in any direct action of God has always been a disquieting element in a great or organised Church. The best Judaism could do with the apocalyptic

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hope was to say that if Jewry would observe the law perfectly during a single day Messiah would come. That is to say, so long as men consent to submit to the great Church's regulations, they are at liberty to believe whatever they please about the future. Accordingly, while the Synagogue could not remove from its canon the earlier apocalypses, it admitted into its later canon only one of the greater productions of this school of thought ; and the one which it admitted was naturally the book of Daniel, for Daniel was represented as having bowed his head to accept the Jewish regulations—he observed the hours of prayer, refused “unclean” meats, and so far observed the law in Babylon.

But there were souls in the Synagogue who refused everywhere thus to limit the power and the grace of God, because they believed in the privilege and the duty of the devout spirit to reach direct intercourse with God. To them it seemed possible and even sure that God could come, and in His coming could make all things new. Many of them had realised how this faith was maintained and insisted on in the apocalyptic books, and they found in Christianity a warmer sympathy with their fundamental faith. For, in its naïve and mighty youth, the Church was filled with this sense of God's nearness to His world. Men, to whom the moral strain of life had seemed impossible, slaves in the Levantine sea-ports, Jews in the Eastern ghettos, little traders in the bargaining and petty bazaars, reached up to Jesus Christ, and found Him sufficient to make a moral and spiritual life not only possible but victorious. They found themselves renewed in the spirit of their mind, not by a painful and slow change in their outward conditions of life, but by the recognition of how near God had come

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to them. He had given them redemption from the world, so that they put it under their feet. What more natural, what more inevitable than that defeat and disorder should be removed from the world, as these things were triumphed over by Christian men? The Church in its young hope could dare to anticipate a complete renewal of the world's life by God, and in its victorious sense of God's nearness it could expect the restitution of order at the hands of God. Because it had this faith, it drew to itself the like-minded from the hardening Synagogue.

The times in which apocalypses were most in demand deserve notice in this connection. To reserve attention to the books which are considered here, Daniel appeared, when Judaism, brought sharply and for the first time into contact with Western civilisation and threatened in all its distinctive ideals, was passing through one of the difficult crises of its history. The book of Revelation appeared, when the new Christian view of the universe was set in opposition to the Roman Empire, so that men could not fail to recognise the fundamental antagonism between the two. In general, these two books were meant to sustain men, when faith in any spiritual government of the universe was hard to hold ; and they did sustain men by their triumphant confidence that the spiritual government of the universe rested on the will of God, and that He was about to assert it. Now, when the world is moving with tolerable smoothness, men within the Church are apt to imagine that the course of things can be regulated and controlled by a Synod of Rabbis, or a Bench of Bishops, or a Committee of the General Assembly. These settle everything, even the limits of God's grace and man's devotion. They tithe mint and anise and cumin, but,



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as for the weightier matters of the law, they are convinced that these were settled long ago, at Jerusalem or Nicæa or Geneva. It is precisely when the foundations of all the world are shaken, that the weightier matters emerge and assert themselves. Then the ultimate question as to whether life has any spiritual significance at all is sure to come to the surface for reconsideration.

The apocalyptic literature represents the effort on the part of spiritual men in such a time to say that they are in a world which is not only created, but guided to a worthy end by God. The ultimate basis on which the world rests is the will of God, and He did not create it in order that it might tumble back into moral chaos. Every great convulsive movement, which may shake the structure through and through, only brings out more clearly the question of what is in God's mind for it all.

But this only brings us back to the initial difficulty. Can men to-day accept the apocalyptic attitude in any vital sense and find that it relates itself to their present need and thought? The difficulty for the modern Christian and for the modern Jew is a difficulty which both share equally. Apocalypse believes that God can at any hour intervene to renew a world which has fallen into confusion, and can, by the assertion of His power, set it right again. It rests on a postulate of faith, which implies a conception of God's character. And here our difficulty seems double.

On the one hand, the scientific view of things relegates the control of the world to certain laws according to which God has willed that it should be governed. How these may relate themselves to the moral constitution of man, whether they foster or hinder it or merely serve as an

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indifferent theatre on which it fulfils itself, it may be difficult to determine. But it has ceased to appear natural to our modern thought that God, even in the interests of the spiritual order, should directly intervene to change the course of this universe. It has accordingly become the habit for the Church to accept that part of apocalyptic teaching which looks for conversion in the individual and which sets the promise of immortality before the individual beyond the limits of time ; but Christian men hesitate to believe, or rather they simply turn away from the idea, that God, through angelic or other means, will convulse and renew the whole order of nature, even for the sake of renewing the moral order. The same thing is true of the Jew. Such Jewish writers as Zangwill and Leon Simon who accept the modern attitude, are compelled to apologise for apocalypse as a strange excrescence on their native faith. They hold vigorously and appraise highly the Judaism in which they have been reared, they insist justly and proudly on how much it has contributed to the world ; but they do not know what to do with apocalypse. Not knowing what to do with it, they follow a common method in difficulty, and, despite the fact that it is embedded in their Jewish prayer book, they try to ignore it. This conception of God's relation to His universe is a difficulty to Jew and Christian alike.

Another element, however, in our modern approach to such questions makes it difficult to appreciate the attraction apocalypse once exercised over the minds of men. Apocalypse looked for a new order among men through the direct action of the power of God, who had the right to bring back His creatures to a path of obedience which they had forsaken. What He had the power to do, He

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should do at any hour He chose. But Christian men have come to believe that there are some things which even the Almighty cannot do, because His ends are moral and spiritual. In particular, He cannot exact a compelled obedience. If men are to be His servants in any real sense, they must be willing in the day of His power. To make them such willing servants, more is needed than the unbaring of His arm. Men must be able to welcome the new order, when it emerges through the fiat of the Almighty, and to make them willing there is needed, not only the power, but the patience of God.

Hence it may be said that it was a right instinct which made the Church, when it had set its mind to the vastness of its mission, move away from the apocalyptic position and cease early to produce such literature. The more it sank its mind into the methods, as well as the ends, of its Master, the more it turned away from an intervention which was to force goodness on a forgetful world. Spiritual ends must only be reached in a spiritual way. It may be added that, whenever men lose from sight how the end for the world is a moral and spiritual end, whenever they can conceive it merely as a material end, the method of reaching it becomes as material as the end which is sought. In this sense Sabatier's saying about the modern representative of apocalypse being socialism finds its strictly limited truth. When men conceive the purpose of the universe to be the equitable distribution of material good, they will conceive it possible and legitimate to bring in the millennium by force.

It is not difficult to see how the scheme of thought, because of its emphatic insistence on the direct action of God, has always appealed readily to the simple, and,



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above all, to the devout mind. The devout spirit of the untutored man will always welcome every system which makes large room for God, and will always recognise how in the end that for which the Church stands is large room for God. On the other hand, the man of trained mind will always find it difficult to recognise how, in a world so full of natural law and so clearly arranged for moral freedom on man's part, God can intervene as apocalypse expects Him to do.<sup>1</sup>

But, when it has been acknowledged that the apocalyp-tists expected the divine intervention after methods which men to-day cannot accept without grave limitations, is there any agreement left, or anything to be learned from them? Surely this is left, that the new order, however it may come, is sure, because it is the will of God. On the throne of the universe is no blind chance, but One who gave it its beginning and will bring in its end, because He means well by it. Devout men have always been apt to say, and probably will continue to say, that they know how He will bring in His end, and even when He will intervene to renew a broken world. Yet their security, even in their disappointment, rests on the conviction that there is a spiritual order which is not the dream of men's minds, but the will of God. How it fares with men who cannot hold this conviction the present convulsion has shown. The men who put their trust in the natural processes of life or in some progress belonging to the nature of things have gone bankrupt. Professor Bury has been compelled to say that there is no evidence for such

<sup>1</sup> I think it capable of proof that the Old Testament is already conscious of the reality of this question and that the early prophets had begun to move from the idea of cataclysm to that of evolution. cf. my article in the *Expositor*, August, 1919.

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inevitable progress or natural evolution ; and the irritation with which his book has been received in many circles may be the sufficient proof of how men have felt this declaration of bankruptcy. The victory which overcometh the world, and can bear the sad defeats of human effort comes from what is above the world. And to the Christian man what is above the world is God, whose sovereign will is behind all things. The free spirit of man and the power of God can and do make all things new. Otherwise the old remains with its foul disorder.

But apocalypse, further, believes that there is a real end both for the world and for individual men, and that this is worthy of Him who created both. As such, it is one which men are called to share, with the result that all who accept it pass out of the dominion of the present disorder into the new world of light and order which is on the way. They are delivered from fear and from the hesitations bred of fear, for they are admitted through God's grace into a world which shall yet be perfected and brought to fulness. Hence apocalypse does not ever conceive of immortality in the sense of a state wherein the futilities and failures of the present are to continue maundering on for ever. Life is to come to an end, and its end is fulfilment.

And, finally, apocalypse insists that salvation is of the Lord. This teaching on its part has generally been recognised merely as holding to a supreme act on God's part by which He intervenes. But it deserves ample recognition in justice to this type of thought, that its chief burden was to deny the possibility of any true salvation from any lower source than God. The real ends of life, because they are high and sacred, cannot be hoped

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for from borrowing the methods of the world or even through little devices of human cleverness. Only a spiritual agent can bring in a spiritual end ; so great a thing as a new order can only come by reliance on the forces which belong to the higher world which is desired.

Because it believed in this so absolutely, apocalypse was teaching a principle which must criticise and destroy some of its own conclusions. The more it hoped for salvation from the Lord, the more it believed He had made known His purpose in the patience of the saints, the less it could insist on a cataclysm as the only means or the worthy means by which God made the world anew.

## CHAPTER II

### Apocalypse : Its General Character

APOCALYPSE is not a new phenomenon in Hebrew religion, which sprang up after the period of the exile, and which has little connection with or relation to the thought of the period which preceded it ; it is simply the continuation, under the new conditions of the post-exilic period, of the message of prophecy. The form was different, because the writers were living men who, seeking to meet the needs of a new time, refused to be trammelled even by the forms of their mighty predecessors. Thus it is idle to urge that the prophets were essentially preachers, while the apocalyptists wrote down their visions, for Ezekiel combined both methods and Jeremiah wrote a letter to his co-religionists in Babylon, yet no one has called Ezekiel and Jeremiah anything except prophets. The fact is that both sets of men used the means which could best effect their purpose. And, as the form changed when Jewry became a diaspora which could not be reached by the spoken word, so the emphases were changed with the change in the outward and inward condition of the people. But the essential features of the two forms of thought and action remained the same. Apocalypse and prophecy hold the same conceptions of God and of His relations to the world, and both sought to say what God, being what He was, must effect when He revealed His will in a world which had forgotten its dependence on Him.



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It is impossible to draw a sharp line across the course of Hebrew thought and say, here prophecy ends and apocalypse begins. The two movements merge into each other. Many students will agree in calling Joel an apocalypticist, some will call him the first of the company. But the moment one lays hold of his peculiarly apocalyptic features, one finds that he is presenting, not his own opinions, but traditional material. What makes this more significant is that, when he is writing of things which he has experienced, he has a definite and vivid style of his own. His picture of the locust plague and of its effects is not borrowed from anyone, but is directly taken from nature and sharply outlined. Yet what this means is that it is only in connection with the subject on which we are asked to believe that he breaks new ground, *viz.*, the apocalyptic eschatology, that he shows himself not original, but a direct borrower from his predecessors, especially from Ezekiel. His prophecy of the outpouring of the spirit in the latter days, his view of the nations brought for judgment before Jerusalem, his verdict on the immunity of Jerusalem because the Lord has taken up His abode within it, are all features of his message about the future, which, in their underlying ideas as well as in their external form, are borrowed from Ezekiel. Why should these utterances be regarded as prophecy, when they appear in one book, and be classed as apocalypse, when they take a slightly different form in another book? Recognising the situation to a limited extent, some students, like Duhm, label certain sections in the prophetic books as apocalyptic "elements" and pass on. But so to act is to settle nothing, for it fails to recognise that these "elements" not only form part of the prophetic books,

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but are integrally related to the convictions of their authors.

Prophecy and apocalypse alike teach a teleology. To both sets of men the world has an end, which is appointed for it by God who brought it into being as a world.<sup>1</sup> The end must therefore be worthy of Him who controls all, it must be a rational and moral end. The universe must become a cosmos, which throughout serves and manifests the will of God who sustains it. Hence in the consummation, when God intervenes to wind up the process of time and, in particular, to vindicate His purpose, everything which opposes this blessed will of God shall be swept away and only what has a basis in reality, which is God's will, shall continue. Yet, while the main stress is laid on the restoration of the broken communion between God and man, to all these teachers more was needed for this perfect and blessed condition than simply the restoration of harmony between God and man. The world also, which brought forth thorns and thistles as man brought disordered passions, needed renewal and should receive it. The present constitution and order of nature did not in their view manifest or minister to an order of righteousness. And, since the order of nature was no indifferent theatre on which man was set to work out his moral task, since it too came into being as an expression of the mind of God, it also should be renewed. The fulness of the whole earth was to be God's glory, i.e., a self-revelation of God. Hence so early a prophet as Isaiah expected a world, where not only should war cease among men, but cruelty should cease

<sup>1</sup> I use this clumsy method of expression deliberately, because it remains uncertain whether prophets like Amos believed in a creation *ex nihilo* by God.



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among the beasts, and the later apocalyptists expected the coming of a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. In this new, because reconciled creation, which now adequately represents His mind, God can and will dwell. Sometimes Ezekiel seems to expect that He shall take up His abode there, more generally He dwells there in the person of his representative, Messiah. Into this new world are carried over "the remnant," all who have committed themselves to that to which it owes its being—the will of God. And, since this earth shall now serve the purposes of its Creator and thus becomes able and willing to serve the uses of His reconciled people, it shall show a new and happy abundance. The sower shall overtake the reaper, the hillsides shall flow down with new wine. The weary toil of man for bare subsistence shall come to an end, for the new earth shall spontaneously serve the purpose of God by serving the uses of man. Sometimes this idea is developed into what may seem rather grotesque results in pictures of abundance and feasting which grate on "refined" minds. But, if we had a greater sense of the unity of man and nature, and if we had lived face to face with the desert, that barren place which seems to serve no master but death, we should better understand the conception of a world which is to laugh out into abundance, as it finds its true place in serving the manifold needs of humanity which then uses all its gifts to serve God. Earth and man shall be in harmony, because, and only because, earth and man are in mutual harmony with the purposes of their common God.

Prophecy and apocalypse have this further in common : both believe that this blessed condition can only come

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through the direct act of God, and that it is about to come through an immediate act of God. After describing the drought, and famine and pestilence which have been sent as warnings to the people, Amos bids them prepare to meet their God, when He comes Himself. Revelation announces Maranatha, the Lord is near. Because, for the needed and desired fulfilment, nothing less is demanded than a restoration of the harmony between the world and its Creator, because the hope of the end contains more than the reconciliation of the heart of man to God, no effort on man's part is capable of bringing about the new order of all things. Salvation is of the Lord. No less power than that of the Almighty can set right a disorder which runs through and mars the whole constitution of nature. All that any man may do, and what he must do is to see to it that, when the great hour of consummation in which God renews this world dawns, he be not found pulling down what God means to build, building what God must pull down. What is within man's power, and what remains his constant duty is here and now to put himself into a right relation to the great coming age, so that, when it arrives, he may be taken up into it, and not fall into the outer chaos, the end of which is to be swept away.<sup>1</sup> Here, of course, there is great room for divergence among the successive teachers. None of them was drafting a treatise of ethics; they were seeking, by tongue or pen, by speech or pamphlet, to influence their own time. In stating the valuations which were to be re-affirmed in the time of the end, they must state these over against the needs of their own day; they must emphasise those sides of the divine order

<sup>1</sup> This statement is modified, of course, by what is stated on pages 205ff., as to the power of intercession and self-sacrifice.

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which their fellow-men were forgetting and urge the rejection of standards which were creeping in among the men whose souls it was their task to save from an untoward generation and from its false estimates.

For, again, prophecy and apocalypse agree in insisting that much, when the new day arrives, must be swept aside. Because, on the one side, God is a righteous God and the new order must be in harmony with His perfect will, because, on the other side, the present world of men and nature is so utterly failing to manifest His righteousness, the new day, when it dawns, must be primarily and always a day of judgment. In it shall vanish everything which is capable of setting itself in opposition to Him who now asserts Himself. This judgment is, of course a mere preliminary to the setting up of the perfect order, but it is an essential clearing of the ground on which the perfect order shall be built. At the rising up of the Almighty to vindicate His final purpose for the universe, the first necessity is that all which has hindered or can hinder the full consummation shall be abolished. This preliminary act of judgment, to use an expressive phrase of Judaism, constitutes the birth-pangs of Messiah, severe and agonising in themselves, but soon forgotten for joy that a new man is born into a new world. Here, however, there might seem to emerge a significant point of difference between prophecy proper and apocalypse. For prophecy foretells a testing trial of Israel and a sifting of the better elements out of the nation, in the day when God comes to set right His world. Only the remnant, only those who have elected to live by the standards which God's coming makes valid and enduring, shall be carried over into, and find their place in the new order. The early prophets even set



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in the forefront, as the main burden of their message, how judgment must begin where privilege has been greatest. Apocalypse, on the other hand, seems to dwell on a judgment which is confined to the nations, and to regard Israel, *quâ* Israel, as having its place by right in the new order with the security and blessedness which this brings.<sup>1</sup> To the later men judgment might seem to begin, not *at* Israel, but *from* Israel. The difference between the pre-exilic and the post-exilic teachers might here seem to constitute a difference in principle, since their different view of the effect of the divine intervention will then imply a different conception of the divine nature and of God's relation to His people. Or, it may be urged that here apocalypse renounced the universalism of the prophets, and, by falling back on the national ideal, turned the great future vision of their forerunners into a fantastic dream of the glory of Israel. No one has ever shown how the exile was capable of producing so far-reaching a change.

Early prophecy spoke to Israel, a nation, constituted like all other nations on the basis of birth and language, history, country and tradition. Many of those to whom the prophet spoke had no real conception of the nature and mind of Him, from whose awful presence the prophet came to speak to them. They thought of Him as the good old God of their fathers, who might leave them in the lurch at times, but whose return for their help was as sure as the dawn and as indifferent to their moral attitude. The first message of the prophet must be that, when the righteous God revealed Himself, He must sift such a nation.

<sup>1</sup> I put the matter in this very general form, because Apocalypse takes very divergent views on this question. See the valuable summary at the close of Dr. Leckie's *World to Come and Final Destiny*.

## Apocalypse : Its General Character

Indeed, the first effect of His self-manifestation must be to show how the basis on which Israel stood had nothing in common with the basis for a religious communion. The kingdom of Israel had no relation to a Kingdom of God, which was constituted for moral and spiritual ends. Only the remnant, who accepted the principles of God's righteous government could be carried over into and find their place in such a Kingdom of God. The nation and the kingdom, as they existed, were not religious magnitudes, but were constituted on a wholly different basis. Hence Amos said that, in the day when God made clear the basis on which His Kingdom was to be set up, His first act must be to remove the kingdom which was only obscuring the true foundations and the supreme values. And God should do this, not Assyria, or another ; in the interests of religion the kingdom of Israel must go. It was the Israel, who submitted themselves to the divine demands, to which Amos' successors promised the great future.

But with the exile the situation was wholly changed, for a profound alteration had taken place in the community to which the prophet spoke. The little community which reconstituted itself in Judæa was no longer a nation, but was a communion definitely set on the basis of religion. It gathered itself in Judæa at the bidding of its religion, round Jerusalem as a religious centre, centring on the restored temple as the organ of the true religion. The men who composed it had deliberately separated themselves from the world to which they otherwise belonged for the sake of the Kingdom of God. They were different from the rest of the world and even from many of their fellow-Jews, in that they had voluntarily accepted the standards, and submitted to the demands, of their faith. Their

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religion was no longer the old religion of the circumcised Jew ; it was a personal conviction, an acceptance of their God's demands on life and of His valuations, as they understood these. They were different from the rest of the world, and what made the difference was their religion. The inevitable result was that they were conscious of how the future of religion rested with them ; in them, as a matter of fact, was the hope of the future.

The situation had its effect on the religious teachers. The change in the condition of the community dates from the return out of exile, and so does the changed religious note. The later prophets were speaking to a community which was now constituted on a religious basis ; hence to speak of their new attitude as a lapse into nationalism is to ignore their position. Israel was a Church in the sense that its distinctive life lay in the effort to fulfil the demands of its faith. Their teachers made the distinction which all the communions have made between the Church and the world ; and, like all the religious communions, they idealised their Israel on its new basis, and said things about it, which were only true about an ideal which it never attained. Thinking of Israel as now separated from the world by having accepted God's standards for life, and as holding fast in an indifferent world the divine values, they thought of Israel as the heir of the great future. They declared that the coming judgment would vindicate the principles to which the new Israel had committed themselves, and that God's self revelation would manifest an eternally real the values for which Israel had elected to give up many things which make life dear and pleasant to men. They applied to the new Israel all the promises which their predecessors had pronounced for the remnant. These



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men had separated themselves from their world, in order that they might better fulfil the dictates of their faith and live by what they believed the standards of God. When, therefore, God made valid His standards in the new order, they should pass untroubled through the judgment and take their place in that new thing to which they had already committed themselves.

It deserves attention in this connection that most of the so-called apocalypses which have come down came from times of sore trial and even persecution. Worldly interest could have had little influence in swelling the numbers of those who cast in their lot with the poverty-ridden, politically suspect, disease-vexed body of men who rebuilt Jerusalem, because they believed in God's verdicts of truth and right. The men for whom these tracts were produced later were holding the faith grimly, but almost despairingly, in the face of isolation and disappointment and occasional persecution. They were too the men on whose steadfastness in very black days much of the hope of the world's future rested. It is not hard to see why their prophets said about them things which were true about an ideal Israel such as these men were struggling to be, but which were highly coloured when directly applied to the men whom they actually addressed. Men are able to say things to-day about the Church, about its separation from the world, about the certainty of its future and its influence, things which are only true, and which they know to be only true, about that ideal Church which is the body of Christ. And they are able to say them with much less justification. Every wise man knows how inappropriate such utterances are to the existing communion of which he humbly and gratefully makes

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a part ; but, especially in hard days, when the faith of men needs heartening, they say things about God's presence with and in His Church, which are true only of the ideal. The later prophets were only applying the same principles which had governed the early prophets to the new institutions and conditions of their time. The difference between apocalypse and prophecy is not one of principle ; it is the difference which comes over every ideal as soon as it has taken shape in an institution.

The same thing is true as to the causes which prompted the prophets to utter their warnings and promises. Here it is necessary to recognise that we are dealing with an uncertain magnitude, the element of what may be called mysticism. All these men believe that the message which it is theirs to deliver came directly by revelation from God. Personally I think it wise to accept the statement as expressing their sincere conviction as to their experience ; but, as I find nothing in our modern religious life which is precisely analogous, there is nothing with which we can compare the prophetic inspiration. Men who believed themselves to have received a revelation as to the day of the Lord were governed by promptings and guided by influences which are not exactly those of ordinary men ; and, when an ordinary man tries to interpret what moved them thus to speak, he is liable to make grave mistakes.

With this caveat, however, it remains possible to learn something on the subject from the actual occasions when such utterances appeared. The prevailing—one cannot say, universal—occasion is some period when the distinctive character of Israel, which to all these men means its religion, was in danger. Sometimes, as in Amos and Hosea, the threat to religion comes from the chaotic condition of

## Apocalypse : Its General Character

Israel's moral and spiritual life, to which Amos adds the similar chaos in the world in which Israel is living. Sometimes, as in the case of Ezekiel, the danger arises from the collapse of the national institutions and the scattered, helpless state of exiled Jewry. Again, as in Joel, a locust plague which threatens to bring famine is setting on hazard the existence of the little community which has separated itself from the world to become the lamp of true religion. Or, as with Haggai, the indifference on the part of that community to the plain summons of duty and sacrifice for its faith, is threatening to make all the travail of the past futile. Finally the writer of Daniel sees the new regulations of Antiochus IV threatening to destroy the Jewish worship and faith. In every case prophet or apocalyptist comes forward to express the fundamental conviction that, since religion implies nothing less than the will of God, its future is absolutely sure.<sup>1</sup> When man's help seems useless, God's help is nearest. He, whose cause it is, is about to arise and make clear to a forgetful and indifferent world what is His perfect will with and concerning it. Such a conviction on the part of the apocalyptists is generally contrasted with the attitude of the prophets, and described as the outcome of a deep-rooted pessimism and despair about the world. In reality it is in both the expression of their humble confidence in God. Luther, with the fine instinct of the religious man, recognised this as the dominant note in their

<sup>1</sup> The great exception here is patently Deutero-Isaiah, who seems to connect the divine intervention with a deliverance of, not a threat to, Israel. It is clearly impossible to enter into the question here; but it at least deserves notice that here the action of God is connected with a crisis in the nation's faith, and so in the world's religion.



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message, when, in a very dark hour of the German Reformation, he translated one of the apocalyptic Psalms (Ps. 46) and made it the battle-song of his co-religionists. Men who believe in a personal God are never able to believe that the world is delivered over *permanently* into the power of evil ; and men who say that God will intervene to-morrow are the last people who deserve to be called mere pessimists. The more the forces of evil are winning, the more do they reveal what they are and what is their inevitable issue, the surer is the recoil with their resultant collapse.

It may be said, however, that here at last is a difference in attitude between prophecy and apocalyptic. Prophecy sees the causes which threaten Israel's distinctive life and religion in the great acts of God on the stage of history, while apocalypse is capable of tagging the day of the Lord to a local event like a threatened famine through a locust plague in Judæa, or to a petty domestic condition like the failure of the people to build a temple. But even if Amos ever foretold the approach of Assyria—a matter which is far from proved—what caused him his deep disquiet was that Israel might not possess so distinctive a life as to be able to survive the collapse of its kingdom and to keep the flame of faith alive in the world. And it was quite as serious a thing for religion, if the community which stood as the representative of religion collapsed or dispersed through starvation, as if it were scattered through the advance of another nation. To be sure, it was not so picturesque, but from the point of view of the interests of the faith it was quite as serious. It might, also, be as grave an indictment of a religious community to say they were not sufficiently interested in religion to maintain its outward forms, as to say that they failed to recognise some of its other

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requirements. Both bodies of religious teachers are dealing with the events of their time from the same point of view, *viz.*, the effect which these produce on Israel's religion. Both are dealing with the internal condition of their people from the same point of view, *viz.*, whether they are sincerely seeking to maintain their national life, which is their religion. Both maintain that in the end this religion, because it expresses the ultimate values, has for its support the will of God. What this implies is that prophets and apocalyptists agree in principle and are great enough religious teachers to be able to apply these principles to the varying conditions of their times.

So far is it from being the case that the later writers have a poorer sense of the great movements of history that it is possible to see precisely among them a development in the direction of a larger, not a smaller, theatre for the operations of God. Thus it is Daniel who sees the succession of the world kingdoms in the beasts rising from the great deep, dominating for a period, and passing, each to give place to its successor. The long pageant of history has evidently impressed the minds of the writer of Daniel and the author of the Apocalypse. But, while the horizon has widened, the point of view of the spectator has remained the same. Amos could speak of God leading the Philistines up from Caphtor and the Aramæans from Kir, precisely as Daniel saw the mighty Empires which controlled the world rise and vanish by the decree of the Almighty. The later writer has the wider outlook which is the result of Israel's experience of the vaster world into which it had been flung during its exile. Yet while, with the widening of the horizon, has come the sense of the majestic march of empire after empire, each of which has held the world

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in thrall, the reason why the men think about these nations at all, and the point of view from which they regard them, remain the same. Whether it be Philistia which comes from Caphtor or Greece that rises out of the West, each comes by the permission of God and vanishes again at the bidding of the same Governor of all things. Whether they rule a little corner of Palestine or dominate the world, they are pawns in the hand of the Almighty. Neither the earlier nor the later prophet is dazzled by the power of what they see. For both prophet and apocalypticist judge their world by the same standard : and to their severe Jewish Puritanism these belong to the world which of itself can produce nothing and which is doomed, when in the consummation the eternal values are set up. All which Amos sees to be the outcome of the nations is a cruelty which extends beyond death and burns the bones of a dead enemy into lime, a war which disembowels pregnant women whom all decent men spare, a brisk trade in the bodies of living men. All which Daniel sees in the pageant of the Empires is a series of kingdoms, the fit emblems of which are wild beasts, hot, greedy, snatching. When the consummation comes, these are set aside as having contributed nothing of permanent worth to the Kingdom of God.



## PART II

### The Book of Daniel



### CHAPTER III

## The Composition of the Book of Daniel

It does not fall within the scope of a volume in this series to discuss in full the critical questions as to date and authorship of the books which are dealt with. Yet some consideration of these questions can hardly be avoided altogether in a study of writings like Daniel and Revelation, because they are tracts for the times and, unless we know something of the time, we shall misunderstand the tract. I take it for granted, then, that the book of Daniel in its present form cannot be earlier than the period of Antiochus IV, better known as Epiphanes, in whose reign the Jews exploded into the Maccabean rising and proved again how futile it was to try to make a universal religion the basis for a national kingdom. But this does not imply that the entire book was actually written during this reign; and indeed, so soon as the book is read with the recognition that it need not have been written by one man, nor be the product of one period, it becomes evident that there is a remarkable difference between the attitude of its two main sections, Chaps. I.—VI. and Chaps. VIII.—XII.

The last five chapters consist of a series of three predictions, which are put into the mouth of Daniel during the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. These predictions contain a rapid sketch of the history of the world since the time of the Jewish captivity, under the figure of the four great world-empires. As is well-known, the writer

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shows himself, in his description of the final kingdom, very intimately acquainted with the course of events under Antiochus IV, and makes it clear that he was describing the conditions which prevailed in his own time and that he wrote *circa* 165 B.C. The desecration of the temple by order of the Emperor which fell in that year seemed to him the culmination of the world's sin, on which should follow the end. The end, however, consists to him in the final consummation and the emergence of the Kingdom of God. Incidentally this end should bring to a close the suffering of all faithful Jews; but the end was not there in order to bring to a close the suffering of the Jews, it was there to bring to a close the suffering of the world. And He who should bring about the consummation was God. The writer may have been a supporter of the Maccabees, but he would never have said that the Maccabean rising fulfilled his prediction. His hope for the end has a scope and a character which no rebellion, however motivated by religion, could ever claim.

The first six chapters, on the other hand, contain, loosely strung together, stories of the fortunes of Daniel and his three companions at the court of two Babylonian kings. One chapter, it is true, relates a vision of the future which came to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream, and which Daniel, alone among the Chaldean magicians, has been able to interpret. At first sight the chapter seems to bear a close analogy to the last five chapters, since it too predicts an end. But, as soon as the story is examined more closely, it is seen that the differences are far greater than the superficial likeness and that part of the likeness is due to later editing.<sup>1</sup> In particular all that is said about

<sup>1</sup> Note there the patent confusion in vv. 41-43.

## The Composition of the Book of Daniel

the end is that there shall be one, which is to be brought in by God. And the entire purpose of the story is, not to assure the troubled Jews as to the imminence of the Kingdom of God, but to emphasise that the Jew alone through his worship of the true God who makes known His will to His faithful servants, can beat the greatest magicians of the world on their own ground. The purpose of the chapter is not to declare either the character or the imminence of the consummation; it is to magnify the Jewish faith in contrast with the religion of Babylon where the exiles were placed.

If the first part of the book was written by the same man who produced the later visions, it may be supposed that he was seeking to represent, for the encouragement of men in his own time, the courage and faithfulness and resultant success of a true Jew in the past. He was unable to state his opposition to the policy of Antiochus and his view of the duty of his own people in plain terms, because if he had done so he would have drawn down the anger of the authorities, but he counted on the intelligence of his countrymen who could easily read between the lines. Yet if he had a strong faith in the mother-wit of his fellow Jews, he must also have had a strange idea of his own capacity to hoodwink the Greek authorities as to the purpose of the propaganda of the visions. The attitude these took to the Seleucid kingdom stares everyone in the face.

And, when the early six chapters are examined, the Babylonian background is seen to belong to the story, and not to be an artificial feature. Thus the figure of Nebuchadnezzar has not the slightest resemblance to that of Antiochus, nor is there anything in the life described which compels the reader to conclude that here the writer



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has another court in his mind. But what is even more significant in this connection is the attitude of Daniel to the Chaldean kingdom. To him it is the head of gold, and he is able to say of it : " the leaves of the tree were fair, and the fruit thereof much and in it was meat for all ; the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the branches thereof, and all flesh was fed of it " (4<sup>12</sup>). Daniel has no hesitation in accepting office under it and in serving it loyally. He asks mercy for the Chaldean magicians (2<sup>24</sup>), and even becomes their head (2<sup>48</sup>, 4<sup>9</sup>). Jewish piety consists in monotheism, rejection of idols, prayer three times a day, and abstinence from " unclean " food. But otherwise these faithful Jews are singularly lax according to the views of later times as to heathen customs. Not only do Daniel and his friends accept Babylonian names, but they even take names compounded with those of heathen gods,<sup>1</sup> which even careless Jews refused to do under the Seleucids. Daniel accepts what amounts to divine honours (2<sup>46</sup>) such as St. Paul refused at Lystra. The writer allows himself to say that " the sentence is by the decree of the watchers " (4<sup>17</sup>) : now the " watchers " have their origin in the worship of the stars. All this implies an attitude of Judaism to its own law and to the world around it, which is wholly foreign to the atmosphere of Jerusalem, especially under the Macedonian dynasty.

But, further, the incidents which are combined in the first six chapters hang together with extraordinary looseness. The three companions are brought into connection with Daniel in the introductory chapter, but they have practically nothing to do with him from this time. When Daniel is

<sup>1</sup> Abednego probably means " Servant of Nebo."

## The Composition of the Book of Daniel

required to interpret the king's dream in Chap. II., he really acts alone. His request for his friends' prayers in vv. 17ff leaves rather the impression that it has been felt necessary to bring in the three somewhere than that they originally had a place in the story at all. Their appearance has all the look of an afterthought. Thereafter Daniel and the three follow their separate fates. It is difficult to believe that any writer, who was composing with a free hand, and working with a direct reference to his own time and its conditions, should have been so clumsy. The chapters give the impression of being a collection rather than a composition, and a collection from Babylonia, rather than one made at Jerusalem.

It will be observed that Chap. VII. has been omitted from consideration in this rapid sketch. The reason is that this vision offers quite peculiar difficulty and stands by itself in the book of Daniel. The chapter contains a vision given directly to the seer, which presents the familiar scheme of the four successive beast-kingdoms, but with unfamiliar features and accessories. Thus they all appear out of the great deep, after this has been violently agitated by the four winds. The first has certain human characteristics, such as upright stature and intelligence ; the second carries three ribs in its mouth ; the third wears four wings. Now, on the one hand, these peculiar features are ignored entirely in the interpretation, which concentrates attention on the fourth beast and explains its meaning along the familiar lines of Chap. VIII.—XII. On the other hand, these very features, which make the vision so different from the later visions, but which find their analogy in certain sections of the book of Revelation, are best explained as having their origin in Babylonian myths. The fact of their

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resemblance to local myth makes it probable that Chap. vii., like Chaps. i.—vi., has had its origin in Babylonia and has come thence with the others to Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

In view of these and other facts, I am impelled to conclude that the writer of our present book of Daniel incorporated older material which had already taken literary shape. He found the early seven chapters already in circulation, either as loose pamphlets or in collected form. These had had their origin in Babylonia and been already found useful among the diaspora there. They were very loosely connected, but they possessed the common character of relating the story of certain typical Jews at the Babylonian court, how they bore themselves against the seductions of heathenism and how it fared with them. Under this simple form the stories had also a common aim of preventing the scattered Jews in the Empire from deserting their faith. There may even have been a historical kernel in them and a memory of some distinguished Jews who were taken into the service of their Babylonian masters, though it must be acknowledged that it is hopeless now to determine how much actual historical truth lies behind the stories. The writer of Daniel found these in circulation and saw how useful they would be in easing the strain of a more difficult time. So he blended them together into a unity, but, instead of recasting his material into a homogeneous whole, he contented himself with adding here and there a connecting link. His reason for not recasting the stories into a unity may have been mere literary incapacity, but more probably he recognised that, the less he touched the

<sup>1</sup> I confess to offering this explanation with considerable hesitation. There are other difficulties in the chapter which cannot here be discussed but may not be ignored.



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originals, the more power they were likely to have in a community which already valued them. He was using them frankly for propaganda and he knew the value for such purposes of anything which already possessed gracious and helpful associations. What makes one suspect that he deliberately refrained as a rule from altering his material is to note that he did alter it, where he had something fresh to add. His strongest personal interest, as is clear from the closing chapters, was in the vision of the future and in the prediction of the coming consummation. He was a diligent student of older prophecy and especially of all the prophecies which dealt with the consummation. He says that he thought long over the prediction as to seventy years being the period appointed between the exile and the end, and he comes forward with a revelation on the subject. So, when he found among his material a vision bearing on the end, *viz.*, Chap. vii., he had no hesitation in adding an explanation. He took it out of its natural place, for it ought to precede Chap. v., since it comes very awkwardly in after the account of Belshazzar's death. The writer paid no attention to such a trifle as dates, there or anywhere else. He put it last, in order thus to connect it better with his own revelations on a similar subject, and he expounded it after his own fashion. That the later prophets, instead of being the slavish copyists they are often represented, used great freedom in dealing with the work of their predecessors is clear, for the author of 4 Esdras quietly states, "the eagle . . . is the fourth kingdom which appeared to thy brother Daniel in his vision; it is true that it was not so interpreted to him as I am now to interpret it to thee."

But why did the writer, when he had written his view



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of the consummation and written it, as he believed, by divine revelation, put it all into the mouth of Daniel? Why did he give, as his reason for its never before having come to public knowledge, that Daniel was commanded to seal it up till the time of the end? Here the book begins a type of literature, which later flourished widely in Judaism, *viz.*, the pseudonymous prophecy. What is meant by this is not the prophecy which has been mistakenly ascribed to some preceding author, as *e.g.*, Deutero-Isaiah has been added to the original utterances of Isaiah of Jerusalem. In connection with such prophecies, it is natural to suppose that a number of loose and nameless utterances were circulating among the community during the confused period of the exile and after the return. These were collected with pious care and ascribed, with more or less accuracy and by the use of criteria which it is impossible now to determine, to well-known prophetic names. But the pseudonymous prophecy is in a different case: it is deliberately assigned to a man, whose name is given, and who is said to have lived in Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Yet most modern students find it impossible to believe that the book can have been written before the time of Antiochus IV. In the same way, the book of Enoch is ascribed to the Enoch of Gen. 5<sup>22</sup> who is said to have walked with God; the book of Baruch is said to have been written by the well-known secretary of Jeremiah, and the Testimonies of the Twelve are issued as the utterances of the early ancestors of the Jewish community. No one supposes that the last three books were really written by the men whose names they bear.

In certain respects all these phenomena seem parallel, and it appears natural to ascribe them to the same cause.

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For the books have more than this in common, they agree also in their general attitude. They all represent the course of history for a longer or shorter period before the date of the actual writer as having been super-naturally revealed at a much earlier date to the person to whom the revelation came. They generally relate the course of history to the final consummation, and they all plainly believe that the men of their generation will be comforted by the knowledge that the end had been foretold many years before. Naturally such a forecast of history was put into the mouth of a man who on other grounds was believed to be in the divine counsel, and to know more than was given to other men. Thus it was natural to select Enoch for such a purpose. He was spoken of in Scripture as having been taken up into heaven; and hence there had grown up round his name a number of fanciful legends, which related what a man had seen and learned, when he was admitted into the divine secrets. Among the things which he had learned stood specially the purpose toward which God was moving and the time when it would realise itself; and this he was said to have written down for the information of later men. So it was natural to ascribe another apocalypse to Baruch, the familiar secretary of Jeremiah, a prophet who was believed to have foretold the duration of the exile in Babylonia. The patriarchs were credited with having uttered predictions of the end before they died, because dying men were believed to be endowed with a clearer and wider vision. The same cause, it has been thought, may well have led to the selection of Daniel as one to whom to ascribe a prophecy. The name appears in Ezekiel 14<sup>20</sup>: "though Noah, Daniel and Job were in it . . . they shall deliver neither

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son nor daughter : they shall deliver but their own souls by their righteousness," and it is urged that the author selected this famous name as the one to which he attached his prophecy.

I cannot pretend ever to have found this very convincing. Daniel is not mentioned in Ezekiel as possessed of superior wisdom, but of a righteousness through which he was able to deliver others. Nor are the two associates, between whom his name appears, men who are otherwise regarded as possessed of secret knowledge, while one of them found favour with God because of his righteousness and was permitted even to rescue his household in the ark. As for Job, his leading characteristic is his pained and painful inability to find God's purpose for his personal life and far more for His universe. To find in Ezekiel, accordingly, any support for Daniel being credited with super-natural knowledge is rather forced. It would be possible, however, to find there a reason why Daniel was taken as the name of the typical Jew who showed his countrymen the true way to live in the new conditions of Babylonia and yet remain loyal to their faith. Such a man was able to save more than his own soul through his righteousness. Round his name naturally gathered the stories in the early chapters of the book. When the Maccabean writer was seeking in turn to hearten and stimulate the community at Jerusalem, he used this material which, though framed for a very different time, was capable of being applied to his own time. He had, however, more to say than an exhortation to loyalty, he believed himself commissioned to declare that the time of suffering was near its end, because the consummation was at hand. There was the more need for loyalty, because God was about to vindicate the cause of His saints. This



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also he could attach to the name of Daniel, because, among the stories told of the hero of the faith, was one which related how he had proved himself more competent than any Chaldean magus in the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Was it, then, merely in order to gain a certain authority for his own teaching about the impending end that he put it into the mouth of Daniel? When he said that what he was now revealing was a prior revelation which had come in the time of the Babylonian exile but which had remained secret at the bidding of God, was his only thought to obtain for his own teaching the support of a great and honoured name? And when the writer of Enoch, in turn, issued his utterance under the name of one of the great dead, was his only purpose to claim for what he had to say an authority which it did not possess? The solution seems natural and obvious, but there are certain other considerations which make me hesitate in accepting it as the only thing which influenced him. Thus one feature in his revelation of the future which has struck every modern student must have been even more patent to the men by whom it was first read and pondered. Every one has noted how, in his final visions, the writer slurs over the account of the early kingdoms, concentrates attention on the fourth, and enters into such details in connection with Antiochus IV that his account has taken its place among our sources of history on the Seleucid dynasty. He is vivid, concrete and detailed where he deals with the concerns of his own time; he speaks in general and detached terms, where he is dealing with the distant past; he becomes quite vague and general, when he comes to speak about the actual future. This situation is so patent on the



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surface of his book that it inevitably raises the question as to whether it could have been less clear to the first readers. In reality, the position must have been even more clear to them than it is to the majority of modern readers. For the fact of the quarrels between the King of the South and the King of the North, with its result in the King of the North coming against his rival like a whirlwind, with chariots and with horsemen and with many ships, must have been painfully vivid to men, through whose lands and towns the traversing armies marched. Such men must have recognised the facts of the case more clearly than even the modern reader has done, and must have asked about them precisely the same questions which are asked to-day. As soon as they did so, the very means which the writer is supposed to have used in order to gain authority for his utterances became a source of difficulty.

What makes matters worse for those who still believe the book a unity and regard the writer of the visions as the writer also of the stories about Daniel and the three companions at Nebuchadnezzar's court is the hopeless discrepancy thus introduced between these two sections. In his first part, the writer will then have represented a great sage among his people, as speaking and acting in the interests of his faith at the court of a king whom he names, whom every reader knew to have been the king of a definite kingdom at a definite period of time. This sage was able to interpret a king's dream in the middle of an interested court and in the presence of defeated rivals. His companions refused to take part in an act of worship in a great public scene where all the world which served the king of Babylon was present. Yet the account of all these public and astounding deeds is declared to have been kept secret,

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and later to have reached the knowledge of a man who published it in Jerusalem. Questions of this character, which are perfectly obvious to every reader to-day, must have been equally obvious to intelligent Jews in the second century B.C. There is no reason to suppose that the men, to whom these utterances were originally published, were destitute of the shrewdness which has never failed the Jew.

Beyond the mere purpose of claiming the authority of a great hero of the national past, and so commending what he has to say to his fellow-countrymen, it seems necessary to look for another motive as prompting the writer to his action. Now in the Apocalypse John marshals one terrific picture after another of the events which are to accompany or to usher in the consummation, and he is fond of representing practically the same scenes twice over. But he does not always mean that they are to happen twice. One reason for their double appearance is that the prophet sees them, is permitted to see them occurring in heaven, before they appear on earth. He does not think of the events as recurring, but by this means he marks how the events on earth are simply the reproduction of something which has already been determined in heaven. The great enemy of man was defeated in heaven before his defeat on earth. Thus he expresses his conviction for the comfort of his co-religionists that not one of these terrific happenings, however staggering they are to faith, can supervene without the permission of God. He not only has permitted them, but He has set a limit to them and decided as to their issue. Their issue shall be the consummation, and this is at hand.

So, in Daniel, the dreadful happenings of his time had all been foretold to one who was in the secret of God's counsel by Him, without whose will they could not have

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supervened at all. They could be foretold, because their issue was determined. The strange, appalling confusion of the world, where events came and went in apparently meaningless repetition, where kingdoms rose and fell, where, while the figures of the kings changed and the borders of Syria and Egypt shifted to and fro on the map, nothing ever seemed to advance to any real issue, all this desolating and heart-breaking condition of mortal things was finally controlled by the infinite counsel of God. He had foreseen it all, and was controlling it all. Nothing, even the smallest detail, had happened or could happen without His will. Not only did He see it all before it came, and see how it would run its course ; but He had determined its issue. Its issue was to be, not something which Antiochus or Ptolemy determined, but something which was in God's mind for His world. Its issue was to be the consummation, a new and eternal order which came from God. All the mutable kingdoms of earth should vanish to give place to the divine and most human kingdom. And what was in God's mind, so that He could reveal it long ago, was now at hand. In this fashion to bewildered and disheartened men, who watched in sick disgust a world shifting before their eyes like a kaleidoscope, who saw how the alternate victory or defeat of one or another petty king served nothing save his personal ambition and brought nothing which was capable of enduring beyond its little day, the writer brings his unshaken conviction that all this was only present through the permission of the eternal God. He had foreseen all this, and yet had tolerated His world. He could and did foretell its coming to those who were in His secret, so that they endured, seeing the end afar off. Now the end was at hand, a kingdom which expressed

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all God's will. After the beasts had warred out their bitter and futile day, there would come a kingdom, which, because it came from God and so expressed His purpose, could never pass away. It too was in God's mind, foreseen and foretold by Him, for, indeed, it was the ultimate expression of His mind. In the hope and faith of its coming all the saints, who saw it afar off, had been able to endure. Those who were to be privileged to see it actually come could wait and endure with a quieter patience.



## CHAPTER IV

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I TAKE it for granted here that the book of Daniel was, if not written, at least brought into its present form under Antiochus IV. As I have already said, it is not possible in such a volume as this to give an adequate statement of the reasons for taking this position and I must refer all who desire full information on the subject to the relative commentaries, where the question is fully discussed and dealt with.

At the opening of the second century B.C. there appeared a complete change in the outward condition of the Jews in Palestine, for they passed under the control of the Syrian power in the year 197 ; and, as the Seleucid rulers were harsh masters, with their advent to power the Jews entered on one of their many periods of suffering. The suffering, however, in this case as in so many others, roused the old passion for liberty and religion ; and, with the quickening of the old passion for liberty and religion, prophecy, which had long been silent, awoke also to renewed life.

To the uneasy kingdom of the Seleucids Antiochus IV had succeeded. Many circumstances combined to render his throne a difficult and uncertain seat. The kingdom itself was one of those into which the incoherent Empire of Alexander broke up after the conqueror's death. As such, it retained the vice of its origin, since it represented

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the domination of a conquering caste over a population alien in thought, ideals and habits. Such a domination was doomed to be transient, for the conquerors were a mere fringe, and a mere fringe of men who must find their wives from among the conquered. The new comers, mostly settled in the superficially Greek cities which owed their existence to Alexander's horde, were fated to be submerged in the native population which formed the overwhelming majority, and which, both in country and town, held the vitally productive sources of the country's future.

Politically also the kingdom was uneasy. One effect of Alexander's whirlwind of conquest had been to demonstrate the instability of all the Eastern dynasties and the comparative ease with which a well-organised power could possess itself of the new world he had opened to ambition and greed. Rome, possessed of the ambition and the necessary discipline, was not slow in turning its eyes eastward. Through its victory at Pydna 168, it mastered Macedonia and began to follow with more cautious steps the great conqueror's road. How deep an influence the Senate's altered attitude was to exert on the rulers of Syria was soon discovered by Antiochus, since the same year saw him standing outside Alexandria within the ring drawn round him by Caius Popillius, and compelled to surrender all his efforts against Egypt. The ring in the sand told the king how formidable a factor had now been introduced into the politics of his world.

Thus the Seleucid kingdom had no real basis in the support of its own subjects, and was keenly watched by a powerful neighbour; and its ruler was sufficiently intelligent to be aware of both facts. How such a situation must

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influence a ruler and guide his policy is a matter that may seem easy but is in reality very difficult to conjecture. The experiences of the last ten years may well have taught students of history something in this connection. Any one who has tried to understand the course of modern history cannot fail to have recognised the abysmal depths of his ignorance of the real factors which went to determine the fate of Europe, and the futility of most of the facile accounts. Ignorant of the facts which conditioned and determined each diplomatic or military decision, he must recognise how doubly difficult it is to estimate the motives which prompted the more critical of these decisions. And, if this has been proved difficult in an age when the sources of information are, if not reliable, at least numerous, and when the student is dealing with the mentality of men of his own race, it becomes a hundred fold more difficult when the task is that of forming an opinion as to the policy of a Syrian king, who lived more than 2000 years ago, about whose actual deeds information is meagre, and of whose conditions only the broadest generalities are known. Probably the next generation of historians will show a new caution in their verdicts, till men have had time to forget what the present generation has so painfully learned.

Yet it seems probable that Antiochus was driven forward into his policy, not by mere ambition or restlessness of mind, but by the necessity of finding employment for the war-machine on which ultimately his power rested. His campaigns in Egypt, till he was checked by the Romans, and in the further East, where he died, were probably prompted, less by his personal wishes, than by the fact that he must prove himself a head to this governing caste, and, as such, must find them work and loot. But such a rule,

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because it found its support mainly in a dominant class, was doomed to remain alien to the native populations. There was no common aim which could be set before the hopelessly divergent nationalities of which the realm was composed. East and West, then as now, looked out on their world with different eyes; and the West which had entered Syria with Alexander was not the West of Greek culture, but the West of Greek exploitation. The horde led by Alexander was not made up of Greek philosophers, but of the restless Macedonians, reinforced by similar elements who joined them from the lands they overran. There was nothing left which such an Emperor could play in order to unite his kingdom except his own personality. Antiochus and the Seleucid dynasty stood at least for some semblance of order to the Syrian traders and peasants; that they should continue was better than the chaos into which everything must crash down, if they were gone. They stood also for profitable employment to the Greek or Græcised governors of these same farmers and traders. In all probability it is this, and no half insane personal vanity, which explains the rising inclination to deify the ruling Emperor. By this means the existing order in its public representative was set up as the object of reverential regard before the subject peoples. The practice could, of course, find its support in the old religious habits of many of Antiochus' Syrian subjects, but it can never have been sincerely believed in by the Greeks, who were his leading instruments of government.

For such a policy, if it deserves to be called a deliberate policy and should not rather be regarded as the inevitable direction into which the needs of the Empire drove its ruler, the East was tolerably well prepared, and could find in



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it at least a temporary resting place. Its nationalities were inchoate, and, since the collapse of the great states of Babylonia and Persia, had not been able to form a political combination. Some fatal paralysis or weariness must have befallen the Eastern world of the period, otherwise it had never submitted so helplessly to Alexander. Its religions had never shown themselves much of a power to guide or to inform life in such a way as would have produced a temper which defied outward attack. The ease with which many deities could find their place in a dissoluble Pantheon was a mere reflex of the ease with which the worshippers could combine into an accidental empire. The one place where Antiochus was likely to find resistance was the little community at Jerusalem. Though they had for centuries possessed no political independence, their religion had impressed upon them a definite character. Yahweh was the only god who refused to take His seat in a Pantheon, even if He were given the chief seat there ; and the unique character of their God was mirrored in the unique life of His worshippers. This religion, too, had formed a centre of cohesion round the temple. That the Jewish State was unlike every other State only made it more intangible. Here it was not enough to cow or massacre a body of officials or to confiscate the revenues, for the organisation of Jewry was in every synagogue of the diaspora, and the revenues were voluntary gifts, not extorted by a tax-gatherer. Yet Antiochus dared not hold his hand : he was driven on to suppress Jewry. Its resistance, should it prove successful, was sure to be of bad example to its neighbours. No one could feel certain as to what fanaticism might be latent in the Lebanons or along the Orontes ; and to leave one fanaticism unquelled and defiant was to

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leave a live coal in a powder magazine. The Emperor proceeded to fight the intangible spirit of Judaism with the clumsy weapons of force. He forbade many of the religious usages of the Jews, their observance of the ritual laws about food, their holy books, even their circumcision. He desecrated the temple and set the desolating abomination, a graven image, in the sacred precincts. Antiochus was out to destroy a national temper, and, through the measures he took, he acknowledged that the Jewish nation was the product of its religion. To break down the nation, he must abolish its religion.

The ultimate result was to revive into fresh vigour the spirit of a community which was thus attacked in its holiest ideals and distinctive characteristics. One of the factors in promoting this resistance was our book of Daniel. In face of the direct threat to the distinctive life of Israel, which meant in the end the distinctive faith of Israel, prophecy awoke with its old and ever new message that the religious values are the only enduring values, and that Yahweh in this day of trial was about to reveal their permanent validity. The writer, it should be noted, has nothing to do with the Maccabean revolt, which broke out as the result of Antiochus' measures and which proved from another side the determined resistance of Israel. He was engaged on a wholly different task. His aim was the more fundamental one of stiffening the inward resistance of his people through strengthening their hold on the principles of their threatened faith.

There was need for such a voice and such a work. We learn, both from the book itself and from Josephus, that there existed a strong party in Jewry, even in Palestine, which was quite ready to make terms with the policy of

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Antiochus. It is not very difficult to see where these men came from or why they existed. The little religious community at Jerusalem had organised itself round the temple under the impulse of a strong religious movement. As a religious communion, inspired to their effort by their faith, the first founders had been able to submit to the sacrifices demanded of them and to perform the truly heroic effort involved in founding their community; and through this inspiration they had succeeded in establishing themselves in Judah. But the history of all religious movements has proved how the dangerous hour is not the period of the beginning. The grave difficulty in such a situation emerges, when the sons and the grandsons inherit what has been won, but do not necessarily succeed to the enthusiasm of the founders. It was not hard for the men who began the new religious foundation to forgo the outward and inward advantages, which must always be denied to men who form a peculiar religious sect. They were able to find in their inward spiritual content a make-weight against the seductions from outside and the difficulties within, and, above all, they found in their religious convictions what nerved them to the constant and steady strain of never yielding up their ideals in an alien world. But the community had now been in existence for more than two centuries. Many men had been born into the new Judaism, who accepted its forms as that which every loyal Jew fulfilled, but who did not share the spirit which had created the forms. The outstanding feature in their faith which must have impressed itself on these men was that it distinguished them from their neighbours, and the men had no great desire to be different from their neighbours. To be different from other men only shut them out from the



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opportunities of a bigger world, which had need of them and of which they could make use. On the one side was the Jew, competent and endowed with the moral stability which his religion had given him, on the other was the Seleucid kingdom, needing brains and moral character for its efficient working and especially for its responsible officials. Inevitably the two were finding one another out. The empire needed such men as Judaism could supply, intelligent, temperate. The Jew was conscious of powers which craved exercise, and was able to say that, in serving the conquerer, he need not serve merely his own interests. There must have been more than one man of the type of Daniel whom the empire could use and who was entirely competent to serve himself heir to its new opportunities. But what were the terms? Could he remain a Jew, must he remain a Jew?

But further the heavy fortunes, which had attended the community, may have helped to weaken the hold of some of its members on their convictions. In order to encourage the exiles to return, Deutero-Isaiah had ventured on some sufficiently remarkable forecasts. The desert should blossom as a rose in the way of the returning faithful. To reward their sacrifice, the nations should bring their wealth and lay it at the feet of the nation of priests. But the stern reality had not corresponded with these glowing expectations. The community remained poor, struggling with the harsh conditions of life on the barren hills of Judæa, and as much in servitude to heathen aliens as it had ever been during its exile. Many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, especially in the years of drought or locust plague, may have depended on the charity of prosperous Jews in the diaspora. If, particularly among the later



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generations, the faith of some failed, the fault must partly be laid at the door of their religious teachers. It is always dangerous to make religious duty dependent on an outward success which in this inscrutable world it often pleases God to send, not to the most religious, but to the mentally alert. Many men were growing weary of a religion which seemed to imply social isolation and constant political subjection; they wanted their share in this world, and they did not realise that what gave them the powers which they longed to exercise was the very discipline of mind and soul which they began to feel irksome.

In the diaspora, again, were many Jews who continued to live abroad, though they were deeply interested in the Jerusalem worship. They too were beginning to feel their way towards a compromise. They did not emigrate to Jerusalem, for there would not have been room for them there, if they had, nor did the austere conditions of life in Judæa greatly tempt them. It was true that life under the foreigner in Egypt or Babylonia was difficult to a faithful Jew; but after all Palestine also was subject to a heathen governor. So they paid their temple-dues with alacrity; if circumstances permitted, they probably did pilgrimage once in their lives to the religious shrine at Zion. How greatly such an event bulked in their imagination can be gathered from pilgrim Psalms like 84 and 122, which still throb with the passionate ardour of the singers. These rites and habits kept alive the spiritual tie with Jerusalem and the strong sense of fellowship with their brother Jews, for Psalm 87 again proves how they felt themselves, though widely scattered, to be children of Zion. But they were beginning to find it more and more possible to combine such practices and feelings with a life which had its real

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interests in, and drew much of its intellectual nurture from, Babylonia or Alexandria. What would happen to such men as these, if Antiochus succeeded in his effort to crush the religious centre at Jerusalem?

Many men in this position, notably at Jerusalem, drifted away from Judaism altogether. They were flattered by intercourse with the Greek officials and attracted by the life of the imperial world. They began to adopt Greek names, though, as a rule, they still avoided those which were compounded with the names of the gods. They took part in Greek life, its games, its outward forms. Probably the existence of such men in Judæa led Antiochus to believe it possible to hellenise by force the nation, whose ideals and outlook were fundamentally antipathetic to him. He was more likely to be thrown into association with men of this type than with men like the prophet who wrote Daniel, and he would be apt to conclude that they composed the majority in Jewry. He would believe it more readily because he wanted to believe it.

But there must have been an even larger number of Jews, both in the diaspora and in Palestine, who had no desire wholly to abandon the ancestral faith, and yet were powerfully drawn to take their share in the new world, though they went with a troubled conscience. They dropped an observance here and slipped a practice there, as the conditions of the new life made the maintenance of certain outward forms more irksome. They were on an inclined plane which led continually downward. Little by little they parted with one thing after another which was distinctively Jewish, always assuring themselves that this thing or that was not essential. They had no clear rule which could determine for them how far they might

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go. And many of them ran the risk of becoming nothing at all, neither Greek nor Jew, but simply men who had lost their spiritual moorings and were adrift on life.

It was for such a community and to meet such a situation that the prophet wrote the book of Daniel, and we must try to measure what he sought to say for their guidance, rebuke and help.

## CHAPTER V

### Daniel the Ideal Jew

IN calling Daniel the ideal Jew, one must do it with a reservation which deserves close attention. Prophecy has it in charge, not merely to declare the near approach of the end, but to assert what the end is to bring with it, *viz.*, the final assertion of the divine values, and the final destruction of everything which conflicts with the divine will. It must therefore determine what are the characters and qualities that belong to the eternal order, so that the men who possess them pass unharmed through the final judgment and take their place in the new world. But, since each prophet speaks to his own time, and generally speaks to a difficult time when men are finding their service and obedience a hard trial, he must lay peculiar stress on the virtues which are specially needed among his fellows, and the vices and temptations which are then imperilling the souls of men. Hence the virtues on which the prophet insists and the judgments he passes vary with each man's environment. These teachers were not called to indite treatises on ethics, in which they drew up in complete form all the virtues belonging to one who was to be taken up into the new kingdom; they were preaching sermons or writing tracts for the times, and all they spoke or wrote was meant to meet a definite situation. The virtues held up for admiration are precisely those which faithful souls were finding it most difficult to practise; the



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threatened judgments were pronounced against vices which the prophet knew to be most ready to creep into the unwarned and unguarded lives of his audience.

If then it were to be supposed that in his figure of Daniel the writer meant to represent the ideal Jew for all time, it would be easy to point out how limited and even barren the picture is. Nothing, for instance, is said of Daniel's home life, and very little of his relation to his fellow-Jews either in work or in worship, though the home has always been the strength of Judaism, and though the synagogue was beginning then to take the place of the temple. He stands out a stark, gaunt figure, outlined against an alien and heathen background, bearing his lonely testimony, offering his lonely prayer, apparently indifferent as to the issue of what he is resolved to do. Such a creature, in the form in which he is here presented, never existed. What is presented is a purely artistic creation, the salient features of which are carefully selected in order to urge certain virtues which are being ignored by a generation, in order to warn against vices which a period is making fatally easy.

To recognise this fact is to recognise at the same time how necessary it was to determine, so far as possible, the exact period to which the material is to be assigned. I have already given some of the reasons which impel me to regard the description of Daniel's life in Babylonia as the re-casting for a later generation of stories which took their origin in the early exile. Here, where we are considering the influence of the conditions and needs of the time on the ideal presented by a writer, it is useful to recognise how references to the *peculiar* conditions of the time of Antiochus are nil. There is, it is true, emphasis laid on the refusal of the three companions to eat unclean food at the royal

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court ; and this was a well-known difficulty for the Jews in the period of the Seleucids. But it was not a difficulty peculiar to that, or indeed to any, period ; it was rather a difficulty which must have emerged for Judaism, so soon as its adherents left Palestine and came into any intimate contact with the heathen world. Besides, in view of the far graver difficulties which emerged under Antiochus, and the far severer demands made on the Jew's loyalty to his religion under the Seleucids, this was far too insignificant a feature to deserve to be singled out for special emphasis. As for the refusal to have anything to do with idolatry and the firm stand made by Daniel and the three companions for pure monotheism, that was the characteristic of the faithful Jew in all the lands of his exile and during its entire continuance. There is nothing which can be called characteristic of the Hellenic period or reminiscent of its trials or peculiar dangers in the whole narrative.

On the other hand, the ideal figure of Daniel, lonely in a hostile world, yet living his secret life by memories of Jerusalem and by prayer, was precisely what the early experience of actual exile was likely to create. And when it is recognised as due to the sharp discovery of " how steep his path who climbeth up and down another's stair," it becomes easier to link it with the teaching which made it possible as well as with the experience which made it necessary. The figure is the response on the part of Israel to the teaching of its great prophet, Jeremiah. When the body of exiles who were carried away captive by Nebuchadnezzar found themselves in Babylonia, landless and without outward religious forms, face to face with an alien civilisation, the fundamental ideals of which they could not share, but in the life of which they must take part,

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and the opportunities of which they were eminently competent to use, they were required to face what now they meant to do. Two courses of conduct were open to them, and these were not only presented by their circumstances, but supported by their religious teachers. They might turn a blind face to the new world of Babylon and live in the confidence that the God of Israel should again, as in the days of the deliverance from Egypt, bring them up out of this new house of bondage, and restore them to the well-loved Jerusalem, where and where alone Yahweh could be rightly worshipped by His chosen people. This was the teaching of some prophets who had accompanied the exiles. But Jeremiah, hearing of the influence of Ahab and Zedekiah, and recognising that so to act was to tie Judaism to a city and a stone building as well as to make religion dependent for its existence on successful resistance to the conqueror, wrote his famous letter to the exiles (ch. 29). In the name of their God he bade them seek the peace of the country to which in His providence they had been brought, because in its peace they could find their own. He bade them worship God in Babylonia, with the assurance that they could find Him as intimately there as in Jerusalem. The conditions of a man's life were not in his own power, but the manner of life he lived under them was. God ordered the conditions in what men might judge to be strange ways, but He never removed Himself beyond the reach of any man. Judaism to Jeremiah implied a double allegiance, a loyalty to the world in which a man earned his bread and did his work, and a loyalty to God who could and did give him meat to eat which the world knew not of.

In obedience to Jeremiah the exiles turned to expect, not the salvation of God from Babylonia, but the salvation



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of God in Babylonia. And they created, as the picture of their new task and novel ideal the figure of Daniel, which is simply Israel in exile. Since God has willed to send them into the strange and difficult conditions of exile, it was theirs to learn what He meant for them by the task. Babylonia was theirs to use and serve, a richer land in wealth and opportunity than the bleak lime stone ridge of Judah. They must take what Babylonia had to offer, and give their unstinted service in return, their intelligence, their trained wills, their disciplined morale. They could serve Babylon loyally and accept its recognition in return, winning honour and position in the country of their new allegiance. But always they must live in Babylon, as strangers to its intimate spirit, for the true home of their souls was elsewhere. Their ultimate allegiance was due to another, for their final law was not the law of Babylon, but the will of God.

But if the men were to do this in any real way, one thing was essential. They must recognise the immense superiority of their own faith to all the religions of heathenism. The writer has no question as to the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of his world, for he sees the futility of heathenism beneath its brilliant surface. It has power, but its power, lacking a moral basis, is hectic and evanescent, for it never knows when a stronger may rise to push it down. He sets the glitter of Belshazzar's feast, where men urge pleasure the more feverishly for that they know how shortlived it may be, against the stark sentence, "in that night was Belshazzar, king of Babylon, slain." The verdict could be republished under the Hellenic power, for it had the same basis. Those dynasties had been so boastful, so indifferent to human right, and so transient. Has



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anything enduring for the children of men been built up through their busy marching and counter-marching between Asia and Africa during many years? They have come and gone, serving nothing higher than their own hot brief appetites; therefore they have come and gone.

What is lacking in them is stated with curt directness, when Daniel is set face to face with Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of the world. There exiled Israel judges its conquerors. "Thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule. Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee and break off thy sins by righteousness and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor." A kingdom which does not acknowledge righteousness and which knows no mercy, which does not recognise these as the basis of everything since they are the abiding values of the eternal order, has no hold on reality and shall have no endurance. Israel, inheritor of the long travail of the prophets, believes in a kingdom where righteousness and peace can kiss each other. As for the world of its time, it is brilliant, and full of movement and life; but, stripped of its meretricious ornaments, it is seen to be rotten at heart and impotent even to maintain itself, for it has neither justice nor mercy. And it knows neither justice nor mercy, because it has no God.

What it has instead of God is a number of gods, which are as mutable as its other tastes. If men arrive at thinking of or even owning only one god, this is merely because they believe themselves able to enforce a single authority in heaven, as they have enforced a single authority on earth. The king of all the earth may therefore set up a statue to his like in heaven, and, as he demands obedience here, he may require obedience there. But the authority in the

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one case as in the other holds only of caprice or of temporary power ; it may change its expression to-morrow if the great king has slept badly or has been frightened by superstitious fears. Their gods are like themselves, whether there be many or one. And idolatry of this type is the ultimate enemy of man's soul which exiled Israel must resist to the death, for it means the moral and spiritual chaos, which results from never having unified the moral world, and never having known a final allegiance.

Men are content to change their gods on easy terms. They are prepared to exact or to offer what they call worship, because they can bribe others or because these dare not resist the demand. To-morrow Nebuchadnezzar may be a lunatic finding a home among the beasts, and then his golden image will be recognised for what it is, the whim of a temporary master. Men will transfer their allegiance to a new lord of Babylon and to a new god in heaven, for the god's authority is as evanescent as that of the man who gave him power for a little day. What matter? Meantime men bow to the golden image, not because they reverence it, but because they are afraid of Nebuchadnezzar ; and they call this prostitution of all reverence worship. The issue of such reverence as the heathen gave now to one god, again to another, is uncontrolled caprice. Men's souls, being destitute of true reverence and owning no ultimate allegiance, are at the mercy of casual impressions. Nebuchadnezzar, terrified by a dream, tries to bully and threaten the representatives of his god into telling him what it means. When he hears that Daniel, the representative of a god about whom he knows nothing at all, is able to answer his questions, his superstitious soul is too destitute of any stay to refuse his help. Insolent

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in prosperity and craven in adversity, such men betray that they have no reverence, nothing which prescribes justice and mercy as the only enduring foundations of power, nothing therefore which can be a support to them in their own time of weakness. Against all this world exiled Israel sets its humble and unhesitating answer : we worship God because of what we believe about Him, not because of what we believe about you. Finding in Him a control, we also find in Him a support.

Now this sweeping verdict on heathenism, the natural expression of Israel's Puritanic soul, was taken over and referred to the corrupt Hellenism of Syria. Was it, as thus applied, a just verdict, or may it not be set down as the product of a narrow Judaism, which, intent upon its torah and engrossed in the details of its cult, sat isolated in Jerusalem, and refused to appreciate the rich gifts of the Greek civilisation ? Probably it is wise and just to recognise how this represents the instinctive revolt of a man who knew Hellenism, not in theory, but in its practical outcome after it had become mixed with the nature worships of Syria. It had no strong moral basis which could resist the disintegrating influence of those faiths, as Yahwism had resisted and overcome them in Canaan. This man, who belonged to the faith which, alone among the cults of Syria, stood for moral purity, saw how Hellenism was crumbling before Ashtaroth.<sup>1</sup> The Jew, however, is content to judge it, as he saw it in its practical effects. It could

<sup>1</sup> How much it crumbled it is possible to learn from Farnell's *Cult of the Greek States*, where most of the baser elements in the Greek worship, even in its native home, are traced to Asia. If it could offer such feeble resistance in Greece and in its earlier and purer period, how much deeper must have been the mischief in Syria itself, after the Greeks had already borrowed largely from the more impure source.



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not unify nor support the moral life, giving a man a moral standard from which he neither dared nor desired to swerve. Because it could not give the individual a basis for his moral life, it could not give the state a basis in justice and mercy. These values in the final issue rested on the faith that they were the unchangeable will of God who sustained all. And, because men had no God with an immutable will, the kingdoms they built lasted for a little hour, so long as their builders had sufficient strength to hold them up. It was impossible to build order on greed and fear. Now men in the world round Judaism worshipped a god through greed of what Antiochus could give them or fear of what he might do to them ; and they called this worshipping God.

There was, however, another thing exiled Israel had learned that it must do, if it was to maintain its double allegiance in any real way. It was not enough to recognise the futility of heathenism ; the men must diligently and steadily practise their own religion. In his letter to the exiles, Jeremiah, speaking in the name of God, bade them : " Call upon Me and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. Ye may seek Me and find Me ; when ye search for Me with all your heart, I shall be found of you." The prophet said this with grave insistence in order to counteract in the hearts of the exiles the desolating thought that God could only be rightly worshipped in Jerusalem. He urged the men to believe that, since it was God who had brought them to Babylonia, He would not forsake them there. He urged them to believe in a God who was not bound to a city and a temple, but, believing in a God who was accessible in Babylonia, to put Him to the proof. Exiled Israel put God to the proof and, finding Him, practised the presence of God in their prayers. It had



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even become their habit to pray three times in the day, for so fruitful and wholesome an exercise must not be left to the mercy of chance. Only by the practice of the presence of God could they, living in the alien world of heathenism with its lower ideals, keep the citadel of their inner life their own; without its help they were bound sooner or later to be submerged. Prayer kept before them the eternal values as a standard for life, and a standard for life was what men, who had lost their spiritual home and old environment, specially needed. With such a standard, constantly renewed at no lower source than God, they could measure and weigh their Babylon, recognising, not only what it could give them, but what it could not. It could not give them the salvation of the Lord, and without the salvation of the Lord life was empty. When men took as their guide in life no will o' the wisp from Euphrates swamps, but the starlight, they were able to choose among the many and bewildering roads which their new world offered them, because they knew where they wanted to go. Life had a meaning and an end for them.

Only when men thus keep clear to themselves where their final allegiance is due and never allow themselves to forget the end they mean to gain in life, can they find courage to resist. And Israel had already lived long enough in exile and under the authority of an alien government to discover that life on these terms sooner or later involves resistance.<sup>1</sup> It came to discover afresh under Antiochus

<sup>1</sup> It is, of course, true that we have no proof of the situation in Babylonia having gone so far as persecution. But the burning of Ahab and Zedekiah, Jer. 29<sup>21ff.</sup> and the bitter curse on Babylon in Psalm 137, show clearly how strained the relations at times became.

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the inevitable implication. It sounds very easy to decide that men may live together in human society, though they serve wholly different ideals. No more is needed than that every man should have liberty to think his own thoughts and worship in private his own God, while in the open forum he gives his full service to the community of which he forms a part. Let men render what ultimate allegiance they will to their unseen Deity, but let them serve in public the common good. But Israel had recognised that a man's worship is not a few words lightly spoken, for it means the humble acknowledgment of what he believes to be set on the throne of the universe. And what he believes to be set on the throne of the universe, he will want to set on the throne of his own life and see set in every place of authority. Ideals cannot be kept in an upper room and live; they must assert themselves among the gods of the market place.

It has always been easy on paper to discriminate between Church and State, and, having made a sharp division between the spiritual and the physical, to commit the spiritual to the control of the Church, the physical to the care of the State. In actual life the clean division can never be maintained. The same men are at once the subjects of the State and the members of the Church, and in their different relations they own a differing allegiance. The State has certain ends in view and wants a certain type of citizen to fulfil them; it issues its orders by which it shall procure the best means to serve its ends. Some day it may demand an obedience which will make it impossible for certain men to save their souls alive. Then the opposite ends for life will come into open collision, and men will have to choose whom they mean to serve.

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Are they only citizens of Babylon, finding their complete life in it and drawing their final sanctions from it ; or are they *gerim* in Babylon, seekers after a better kingdom and subjects to a higher law ?

In that day, says the writer of Daniel, we Jews can only be found in opposition, whatever befalls. It may be that then the God, whose orders we obey, shall rise to vindicate our faithfulness and make good our cause before a hostile world ; or it may be that He will not intervene at all. In either case it makes no difference ; we of Israel do not serve the gods of the market place. They answered and said, " We have no need to answer thee in this matter. Behold, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace ; and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O King. But, if not, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." That is the first statement of what is often mistakenly called the rights of conscience. Daniel construes it more wisely as the duty of the soul. The matter only shifted into a new phase, when Luther repeated the task before the Diet at Worms. Then the speaker was not facing a foreign government, but summoned to answer before his own. Yet, whether its orders were issued in the tongue common to both, or expressed the will of a foreigner, the opposition was the same. Some day it will shift into a new phase with the shifting political movement of the world. The order will then cease to be countersigned by Emperor or King, their power having crumbled a little in these latter days. It will be countersigned by representatives of the people, sitting in Parliament or Reichstag or Soviet. And resistance will be made more difficult, as the temptation



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will be more subtle. What right has one man, or a little body of men, to stand up against the will of the majority and dare to claim to be wiser than the gathered wisdom of a nation? The great voice of the people will have spoken and will be more confident that it must be right. What is one man's soul, or one man's thought about God, that it should stand in the way?

Israel, in creating the gaunt, gallant figure of Daniel, conceived very clearly its own duty to its God and its function in the world. Landless, it was to witness of a better country than any to which it pleased God to bring it; kingless, it was to obey the command of a higher government than any to which in its God's inscrutable providence it was made subject. It was there to vindicate the claims of conscience and to witness for the privilege of nation and individual to call his soul his own.

Men wonder why the Jew has been so often persecuted, largely because they forget to ask why men persecute at all. Men persecute the elements which will not accept the standards embodied in their current civilisations, and refuse to assimilate themselves to the ideals recognised by their institutions. Men persecute their critics, in coarser times by prison and death, in milder generations by jibes and social ostracism. They retaliate on the men who will not accept their scheme of the universe by shutting them out from such of the benefits of the universe as are within their control. The Jew, so long as he owned a faith and possessed a civilisation distinctive enough to supply him with a standard, has always been the mordant critic of the recurrent civilisations. Because, during his early exile in Babylonia, he was looking for a kingdom based on justice and mercy, he judged the kingdom in



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which he found himself and which held neither. He stood outside the kingdoms of his world, because he looked beyond them, expecting a kingdom which would express, not the will of Nebuchadnezzar, nor the will of Antiochus, but the will of God.

Yet freedom to maintain such an attitude has always been hard to assert and to allow. The modern civilisations are going to find it as difficult as the old to give freedom, after one has paid lip-service to it, a real place in their life, for the modern civilisations are being compelled to concern themselves with a great deal. Once it was enough to say that government concerned itself with no more than the life and property of its subjects. But now there are so many of us, and we live so closely huddled together ; life has become so complicated and above all so subtly interrelated that merely to guarantee life and property implies constant interference. Government must enter the home to protect and educate the children ; it must enter the workshop and try to decide the relations between employer and employed. While it thus reaches out into all the relations of human life to determine how these shall be lived, it carefully protests that it has and means to have nothing to do with religion. It disestablishes its churches and removes religion from its schools. And because it has evaded touching the outward forms of religion and declined to decide between the rival dogmas, men congratulate themselves on the ease with which they have solved the perennial question of religious liberty. And yet the State is operating with an ideal, the ideal of what constitutes a useful member of the body politic, who will obey the mandate of Babylonia and worship on the plain of Dura, when the sackbuts and cymbals call

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the well-drilled ranks to bow down. Little by little, the State is being driven on to interfere in the lives of its citizens, defining what they shall and shall not do, how they shall earn money and how they shall not. And precisely because it is not influenced by any religion and has no standard for the real values, it comes to accept the lowest standard and defines man's life in terms of his five senses. And, because the rulers of the State do this unconsciously and try to turn men into machines, they are surprised and naïvely annoyed to discover the increase in recalcitrant minorities, who are the men with another standard for life and a different ideal of the true ends for which a worthy life can alone be lived. They will not live as though Babylon, the city of the five senses, were every thing; and they stand stiff backed on the plain of Dura, even when the dulcimers play most sweetly.

Liberty in every generation is growing more hard to assert, and to respect. So difficult is the task that some who were once its most ardent votaries have frankly thrown it overboard.<sup>1</sup> The writ, countersigned by the dominant majority, must run over the habitable world, and for the troublesome rebel remains the fiery furnace. Who then will have courage to stand? Only those who have lived

<sup>1</sup> One of the most interesting modern illustrations may be found in Barbusse's vivid series of war sketches, *Le Feu*. Barbusse, a child of the French Revolution, unhesitatingly asserts that, of the watch-words of the Revolution, *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, the only one the modern world can retain is *Egalité*. The other two are dreams; this, and this alone, is positive and attainable. Define man in terms of the five senses, and liberty and brotherhood are dreams. Define him in terms of the spirit, and these are of his essence. Barbusse sees the issue with the lucidity of the Latin, and with the courage of the Frenchman is not afraid to cry it aloud. That is the real Bolshevism, consisting, as it does, in no mere regulation that we should all receive the same amount of food and clothes and coals. Communism in food and clothes might be merely D.O.R.A.

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by and for a different ideal, and who, through the power of faith, have overcome the world, shall, when the matter comes to push of pike, put the world's mandate under their feet. Exiled Israel was able to defy the order which said, "thou shalt," because it had braced its courage on a higher law which said, "thou must"; and, because Daniel in the last issue did not take his orders from any except the King of kings, he defied the great king's writ. Since it is only an ideal which can finally sustain men in the warfare against another ideal, the last home of freedom, which is a spiritual thing, is in its first cradle, which is the spiritual world. Salvation for a man's soul, so that he may walk free and think freely, is of the Lord.

In doing this, however, exiled Israel stood for no mere anarchic doctrine, nor did it conceive it its business to support rank individualism. The liberty it claimed and exercised was a liberty to serve God, and the God it served was One who had made known His will. Its claim was made from the lower law which it could only judge to be human in its source to the law about which it believed that it had already been delivered to the fathers. Daniel was Israel with all its past, not the dream of a visionary born yesterday. He has his standards, which are not his own, because they are the standards his race had tried and tested through all its past history. So the writer represents Daniel as submitting to all the practices and law of his nation, even in a matter which is apt to be thrust aside impatiently by Christian readers. While yet a lad, he refused the rich food of Babylonia, because to take it would have implied the violation of his nation's law,<sup>1</sup> and

<sup>1</sup> The violation of the laws as to food was one of the demands of Antiochus, *cf.* 1 Macc. 1:47<sup>f</sup> 62<sup>f</sup>, on the definite ground that such a deed was equivalent to apostasy.



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when he reached man's estate, he was found to have strictly observed the custom of prayer three times a day. So is emphasised how the Jewish protest is no sudden whim of an individual, and how the Jewish life was one, homogeneous, clear cut and complete. In the minor questions of a man's habits about his food as in the great matter of his communion with God, his religion has something to say which can guide him. It does not disdain to direct the smallest things, and so it makes the lowliest offices educative, because they become obediences. A man's food need not serve merely his appetite, it can come into the house of the Lord. Through learning that in lowly things they can serve a spiritual end, men learn how all life has spiritual issues. No less do men learn to value and to profit from prayer, that highest exercise of the spirit, when they refuse to leave it unregulated and at the mercy of a casual impulse.

Again the conditions and needs of the time influence the picture of exiled Israel. Many a younger man in Jerusalem, in Babylon, in Alexandria may well have felt the minor details of his law irksome. He could persuade himself that the little things which lay on the surface of his peculiar faith were not essential. They kept him back from freedom of intercourse with his Gentile neighbours, and from gaining the advantages which came within his reach. Though he dropped them, he might remain at heart a loyal Jew. Such men are warned that their feet are on a dangerous road. When men drop customs which have come into existence in order to guide and safeguard religion, not because they have risen to a higher conception of religion which makes these customs unnecessary, but because the practice of them impedes worldly success, they are implicitly setting worldly advantage



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above their faith. There are different reasons which prompt a man to reject the habit of keeping holy one day in seven. Some do it because they believe themselves summoned and able to make all the seven days equally holy, and must reject a custom which seems at least to undervalue the other six. Having reached the position in which they persuade themselves that they are dedicating all their work equally to God, they drop a custom which seems to hint a special holiness for one day and a slacker spirit governing the rest. But a larger number rebel against the restrictions of the Sabbath rest, because it interferes with what they prefer to do with all their life. Not being in sympathy with that for which the holy day stands, they bring down all life to a lower level of possible attainment.

Now Daniel holds to his ancestral law in both cases, where its strict observance stands in the way of his worldly success. One may state his position thus: Every restraint the law has laid on us Jews, especially in our relation to other nations, has been the outcome of long experience. Through these things devout men said to themselves and to their world that they stood for something quite distinct from that which the world sought. And it is not decent to the past nor reverent to our own souls to fling aside the customs which have safeguarded our great trust, merely because they prevent a present outward gain. And men should make sure, even about minor matters, how far they mean to go. There is a difference, profound and far-reaching, between the spirit of the world and the spirit of the faith. It shows itself most patently in connection with minor things, the outworks which have grown up round a faith which has had to accommodate itself with this strange world, where it is never wholly at home.

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But in the end the difference runs deep. And the king of Babylon, who liked plump slaves in the presence and prescribed their table, may some day decree that it would suit the court better if all his slaves worshipped the same god. There has been a good deal of skirmishing between the spirit of Hellenism and the spirit of Judaism. The troubles began about manners rather than morals. Our practices about food have hampered freedom of intercourse, and our customs about holy days have been found very inconvenient for trade. The fact that we kept ourselves apart by rules about intermarriage and dress annoyed men, who could not understand why we should continually insist on our separation. We preserved these apparently trivial distinctions, because they were the outward signs that we were different, since we worshipped another God. Now the lists are set, and the full battle is joined. It has been found more convenient for the administration of the Empire that all its subjects should worship the same god. The king's writ will run more easily and the king's business get itself more smoothly performed, if the sacred books are burned, and the altar fire damped down. Who are the men who will stand for the truth that the primary need of the world is not that the Empire should be smoothly administered? Those who have already given way about wearing Greek dress and eating any food and surrendering every distinctive, external symbol of their Judaism? It is their submission which has led the Emperor to believe that he only needs to issue an order for all this to come to an end. He has come to believe that the Jew does not greatly care to remain a Jew. The men who are prepared to die rather than worship the golden image are generally the same men who risked the loss of the king's favour

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rather than submit to eat of the king's meat. Life is a unity, simplified and strengthened by the sense of how through it all runs the one spiritual reality of the will of God, a will which concerns itself with everything, and which therefore leaves nothing unblessed and unguided. If we Jews make God's will so remote a thing that it seems impossible to conceive it as having anything to say about food and hours of prayer, we shall find it also remote when we come to the ultimate issue as to whether with Antiochus' other slaves, we are prepared to bow down to that graven image at Jerusalem.

Now this is a fine and a stimulating conception ; and the fact, that no Christian finds it possible any longer to believe that God's will demands that he should only eat lentils and drink water, ought not to make him forget how St. Paul believed that the glory of God could be revealed through the things men did eat and drink. And it remains true that, until for the free Christian in his turn God's will can express itself in manners and daily habits, his life will continue to show the deplorable duality which so many free Protestants must humbly confess to exist in their moral and spiritual life, and that great tracts of modern life will remain unhelped and unquickened by the only thing which can give them dignity and seriousness, the sense that in these common things they are fulfilling a greater will than their own casual and peevish impulses. It is easy to sneer at meticulous legislation and thrust aside the efforts which devout and brave men have made to give unity and simplicity to their moral life. But every strong religious movement has tried to find out God's will, not only about the vaster things of life, but about the humblest ; and if Christian men had believed more



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that there was a Christian way of making money and a Christian way of spending it, and tried to find out both, the social and economic life of this country would not have been the chaos it reveals to-day. And still those who have submitted themselves to a moral discipline in little things are those who, in the high hours of the world's peril and their own soul's danger, have refused to deny and betray the interests of the free spirit.

The figure of Daniel then represents an ideal: it is Israel in exile, standing over against the alien world in which it found itself and uttering its lonely testimony, preserving its distinctive life. But it is one-sided, since it only represents Israel's duty to itself and makes its duty to the world a criticism. Hence alongside it was set another figure, that of Jonah, which again is Israel in a heathen world. But now Israel's duty to the world is richer, for it is positive, Israel has it in charge to be a prophet to the nations.

But, because both figures are ideals, each of which may borrow a little from actual history, they are unjustly treated when there is expected in them a precise accuracy in every detail. Thus, when the story of Daniel at the court of Babylon is read as a serious historical narrative, nothing is easier than to point out where it fails as a picture of conditions under Nebuchadnezzar, except to hold up to scorn its psychology of the heathen mind. Men have made merry over the idea of all the nations which owned Babylonian supremacy being gathered into the plain of Dura or any other plain and being reached by any group of musical instruments, however numerous. They have gravely indicated that, even if only the leaders of those subordinate nations were collected to worship in name



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of their peoples, their absence from their seats of government must have produced more mischief than any good their presence at Dura could bring about. They have ridiculed the idea that any Emperor who knew his business ever dislocated the entire frame-work of his Empire for so trivial a purpose, or, by commanding that no man under his control should for a month present prayer or petition to another than himself, burdened his officials with an order which they had no power to enforce. They have insisted that the story of a king of Babylon reduced to eating grass finds no support in historical records, and, in its belief in a human body being able to support itself on such food, sins against all physiological laws. And, when they have gathered all these and similar traits from the narrative, they have with Duhm been able to see in them a proof of "how foreign to the Jews, plunged in the study of the law, was the rest of humanity, and how external and mechanical their treatment of religion had become."

It is, however, possible that if the original author had been permitted to read such a verdict on his work, he might have smiled behind his beard with the silent relish of a great Jewish teacher, who expected humour in his readers, and who only held his peace because he knew that humour is an incommunicable gift. The absurdities which emerge in the incidents, so soon as these are treated as serious historical narratives, only become more noteworthy when it is recognised that some of the gravest of them were capable of being corrected by the help of no more abstruse source than the Jewish history itself offered. Now the writer, who has here incorporated narratives which bristle with historical difficulties, shows himself in a different connection, a diligent and patient student of the records

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of his own people. The fact of his care in the one case and his carelessness in the other seems at least to suggest the possibility that he had a reason for the different treatment given to his two sources.

Probably then the man was seeking to represent ideals, not to reproduce history. He used these stories of life under the Babylonian kingdom in order to say some things which needed to be said about the heathen world in which he and his fellow Jews were living. The kingdom of Babylonia has ceased to mean to him the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar with its capital on the Euphrates. It is the kingdom of Assyria, of Persia, of Antiochus, of all the nations under which the Jews are called to live: it is renewed in every generation, as it has existed in every generation, and it takes Protean shapes. It continually wins a temporary allegiance, for it has the world and its rewards at its command. But, because it lives on force and appeals to men's appetites, it never wins the hidden allegiances, and in every generation it has been shortlived. Over against this kingdom stands the faith of the Jews. It has in it a wisdom higher than the wisdom of the world, because it knows Him whose purpose is being wrought on the face of the world. It can guide and above all it can give strength, for the Jew has proved himself capable of taking his share in the life of the greater world, when the road was left open. Even his enemies must own the fact: "then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." The writer of Daniel thus believed that the peculiar glory of his nation consisted in its refusal throughout its history to barter its moral solidarity for outward advantage. And in this belief he was true to all

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the prophetic tradition. Again and again the temptation had come to win outward advantage at the cost of that moral basis for the national life which can alone enable a people to outlive the fluctuating fortunes that befall states. Again and again the prophets had reminded Israel how so to do was to lose its soul and everything which constituted its peculiar life. Unable to frame institutions which should embody and direct Israel's distinctive character, the prophets had worked with tireless zeal to prevent their people from adopting the alien temper which would in the end have sapped the moral basis which made Israel's life the distinctive thing it was. No more foolish charge has ever been brought against the prophets than the charge which makes them responsible for the collapse of Israel's nationality and national life. As a mere matter of historical fact, Israel's was the only national life in the old world which did not collapse. Assyria and Babylonia, Persia and the Seleucid kingdom rose and passed : Israel persisted, and in persisting contributed continually to the thought and life of its world. And Israel owed that to its prophets who saw how everything distinctive of their nation's life rested on the things of the soul, and who bent their untiring energy to keep the soul of their people alive to the spiritual inheritance they had in charge.

It is possible of course to draw a very depressing picture of the post-exilic community in its increasing absorption in the torah and its increasing self-isolation during a period of great ferment and spiritual opportunity in the world. The men may seem to have been capable of reaching too ready a compromise with the ideals of their prophets, and to have made every meticulous regulation of the past equally valuable and equally sacred, merely because it was

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Jewish. But this prophet does not make the fence about the law binding on anyone, he only recognises the perennial truth that sainthood involves separation, that religion did not produce the same outward life as was common everywhere. And the soul of the people proved itself to be alive under its ashes, when it blazed up instantly at the challenging wind of persecution, and especially when, instead of being content to call its opponents bad names, it first said gravely to itself whence it drew its own light and heat. It reminded itself how the source of its inner life was above, and, being from above, was beyond the reach of any persecutor. Therefore it could never be destroyed, except by its own hand. For its salvation was of the Lord, and He would never betray nor fail the faithful, who waited for His salvation.



## CHAPTER VI

### The Visions in General

THE second great division of Daniel, which contains the visions and describes the succession of the world kingdoms, introduces the material which, because it causes the greatest perplexity to the modern reader, is apt to be passed over. The visions may not, however, in any just estimate of the prophet's attitude, be relegated to a secondary position, far less ignored, since they are really central to his thought. Expressing, as they do, his conviction that the consummation of all things is at hand, and giving the reason why it is at hand, they at once determine his ethic and, to a considerable extent, throw light on his theology. Thus, as has already been pointed out, the character of Daniel, who is Israel in exile, is delineated strictly in connection with the imminence of the end. If the prophet's task had been that of describing the ideal Jew for all time, he could not have omitted, as he has done, so many features necessary to a full picture. He has selected only those features which were demanded by the exigencies of a difficult period, and, in particular, he has emphasised the character which, when God is now intervening to bring in the end, was required to carry the faithful Israelite over into the new order which was then to be revealed. Here again the prophet's ethic is closely bound up with and governed by his theological position. Salvation is of

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the Lord ; his attitude is sharply predestinarian. Nothing which Israel can do, or does do, may retard or hasten a consummation which is so utterly dependent on the will of God that its precise date could be foretold by Him. Nor can anything which Israel can do or does do, win it any reward in the consummation. It is not because of Israel's righteous acts that it shall be preserved, but because it has committed itself to the will of God who is working out His sovereign purpose in the world. Israel can claim nothing in the day of the Lord, as though what it had done had helped to bring in the day or to determine its character or to guarantee its own deliverance. There is no room in all this thought for salvation by the works of the law.

To ignore, therefore, the meaning of the visions is to misinterpret the prophet. But, before examining them, it is useful to dismiss rigorously the idea that in them is described a distant condition which is to concern the men of a much later generation, or that details are supplied as to events which are to happen in a more or less remote future. The prophet is concerned with the immediate present of his fellow-believers and with the immediate future which he foresees as its outcome. His people and he are living in the last times, and must bear themselves as those to whom the purpose of God with His world is about to reveal itself in a new way. How immediate this revelation is, why it must come and what it demands from the present are the burdens of the utterance.

In his view of the end, however, and particularly in his view of what shall accompany it, the prophet occupies a somewhat peculiar position. Indeed, in some respects, his position is so peculiar as to make it legitimate to say

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that his book is not a typical specimen of apocalyptic literature, as, *e.g.*, the book of Revelation is typical. Thus anyone who compares these two books cannot but be struck by the absence in Daniel of anything corresponding to the bowls and trumpets of John. According to John, who here conforms closely to the apocalyptic scheme, the day of the Lord is to be ushered in and accompanied by fearful evidences of the divine judgments. Some of the judgments plainly refer to historical and contemporary events, such as the worship of the Emperor, the conduct of the priests of the Imperial cult, the terror of a Parthian invasion ; others, like the final overthrow of the beast, are of a purely supernatural character : all of them are regarded as sent of God to try the faithful and to chastise the wicked. The whole existing order is visited by terrible judgments, when God arises to manifest His final purposes for the world ; and by these the righteous and the wicked are sifted out from one another and have their final character and condition determined. The judgments of God constitute the birth-pangs of Messiah.

The prophet in Daniel pays very little attention to this common feature in apocalyptic. He describes certain acts of the world-power, such as Antiochus' desecration of the temple, in which, as in John's Revelation, the conditions of his own time shine through. But he does not emphasise that these things are sent of God in order to test the faithful and to punish the wicked, or to separate the two classes. Undoubtedly he regards them as constituting a test for the faithful, but he primarily dwells on them as a proof that men are in the last times. To him they come from the world-kingdom, not from God, and so they are an evidence that the end must be at hand. The Empire has committed



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itself to so extreme an act of wickedness in its open attack on religion and in its blasphemous claim to divinity that its cup is full. In view of so supremely wicked a deed on the part of the world power the Lord cannot but intervene. Hence the prophet stays up the hearts of the faithful under this trial, not by the conviction that God is testing them, but by the assurance that through its act the world has condemned itself. Good men may well be patient, for the time is very short.

The prophet looks at the whole question from his own point of view. As we have seen, his reason for putting the forecast of the future into the mouth of Daniel was that thereby he expressed his faith that the strange and difficult course of the world's history did not continue without the knowledge and permission of God. It all happened so much under His control that He could reveal it before it happened, and He could reveal it down to its smallest details. Hence the prophet could relate some of the trifling events of his time, the changing fortunes of the Egyptian and Seleucid kingdoms, and set them down as foretold. These have really no relation to the time of the end: they have relation to his conviction that nothing falls out in this world to affect the fortunes of good men without the fore-knowledge of God. God has suffered the world to go its own way and has suffered the empires to rise and hold sway. Yet their power does not extend so far as to enable them to turn the world wholly away from the purpose and end which God has destined for it. Therefore there is a limit to what the kingdoms of the earth are permitted to do. Now the fact that the world-power has deified itself and has attacked the true religion, setting up its own image in God's sanctuary,



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is the proof that sin has passed its permitted limit. It is fair to notice that, when the prophet arraigns and condemns the heathen power for attacking the Jew, it is not because it has attacked the Jew that he condemns it, it is because it has attacked what the Jew and the Jew alone reverences. When the wickedness of the Empire has gone so far as to deify itself and deny all reverence to anything higher, it demands and brings the divine intervention. Its hour has struck and with it the hour of the world's salvation.

Again one notes the prophet's point of view through recognising that he was a diligent student of former prophecy. And what specially interested him there was that he believed a time was set for the divine intervention. We shall need to examine how he deals with the seventy years which he believed to have been predicted by Jeremiah before the end. Here it is enough to notice that his special interest was devoted to the period when God should intervene, and to the cause which led to this intervention. To him it appeared that now the prophecy of the date and the cause coincided. The world, running its wild course had proceeded from bad to worse and at last had proceeded so far as to seek to extinguish what stood for a higher order than its own. The forces of evil could go no further than this. It was the hour when God must act : it was too the hour when a great prophet had said He should act. The end was at hand. There was the centre of the prophet's interest. How God should intervene, and by what separating judgments His coming should be marked, he left wholly aside.

The prophet's deep interest in the time of the end shows itself again in the way in which he deals with his

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borrowed material. Chapter VII. begins, in verses 1-14, with a vision of four beasts, which moves Daniel to ask the angel for an explanation. The angel, in vv. 17ff, gives the desired information, but fails to satisfy the questioner, for Daniel presses for a clearer statement, which is then forthcoming in vv. 19-27. The natural interpretation of such a phenomenon is that the first explanation of the vision is the current and traditional one. The prophet is not satisfied with it and has a better, which he wishes to substitute and which he does substitute in somewhat full details. Now the interesting fact about this explanation is the number of things it ignores. Thus, in the original vision the three earlier beasts are described with an amount of detail which proves a desire to distinguish them. But in the interpretation they are simply thrown together and summarily dismissed as three kingdoms; their individual characteristics are of no special interest. What the prophet dwells upon is the fourth kingdom and, in particular, its little horn with the distinctive mark it bears, *viz.*, that it makes war upon the saints. In that deed the kingdoms have filled up the measure of their wickedness and have made inevitable the coming of the end. Here again he shows his preoccupation. This pronounced enmity against the forces of good is precipitating the consummation; and the way in which the faithful bear themselves in the final struggle determines their character and their ultimate condition.

Though, however, the prophet dismisses the three earlier kingdoms so summarily in comparison with his detailed interest in the fourth, he passes judgment on them all. All four are combined by him under a common description, which is also a condemnation; they are kingdoms,

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the fitting emblems of which are beasts, and ravening wild beasts. The distinction of the fourth is that it is regarded as the worst of them all, and, in particular, is set much lower than the first. This is an interesting historical verdict, especially when it is recognised as coming from a Jew, for the first kingdom is Babylon, under which Judaism suffered the loss of its independence and the destruction of its capital and temple. Yet Babylon is the head of gold. The fourth kingdom, on the other hand, is the Hellenic kingdom which the modern student is apt to regard as bringing a fresh civilisation to quicken and fertilise the barren East. The prophet calls it in one place feet of iron and clay, in another the fiercest and basest of all the beasts of prey. Here is a verdict which is one of the very few articulate voices from Syria, and which comes from a man who knew at first hand the thing he described. The fact that he judged so much more mildly the Empire which made Jewish nationalism finally impossible is at least the proof that he was not governed in his judgment by mere Jewish prejudice and bigoted hatred of a civilisation which threatened his own. His standard is patently not national.

Now it is true that the prophet was deeply influenced by the conviction that the world was growing worse and ripening towards its inevitable end. To him and all his like the world, when once it had broken away from the divine authority and had taken its own perverse course, could only run out into more dreary confusion and hopeless misery. It is also true that he can, like every man before or since, think in a more detached way about the past than about the instant and harsh present. The destruction of the temple seemed less hard to bear than its



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desecration, because the burning of the temple had happened a long time before, while the desecrated temple was before his eyes. But that the prophet, though influenced, is not controlled by considerations of this kind is clear no less from his remarkably lenient judgment of Babylonia than from his putting his finger on what makes the fourth kingdom appear so peculiarly hateful to him. His giving a reason at all is the sufficient proof that *a priori* considerations were not everything to him. It set itself, he said, to break up all the little peoples and wreck the individual and distinctive life of the smaller nations. There, of course, one recognises the authentic note of the Jew, possessed of the most distinctive life in Syria, and proudly as well as justly confident of its forming a contribution to the life of the world. But one hears more than this, even the voice of all Syria. It is possible to gather from the prophet's vision a very real representation of what actually happened, when the turbulent elements of Macedonia, reinforced by all the rascality which joins itself to or is swept along with a conquering horde, broke down the feeble resistance of the East, exploited its confusion and battered on its weakness. The other side of the shield is suddenly turned to reveal the groaning East, as it watched its conquerors remove the native governors in order to make room for aliens, control its ancient cities without imagination to understand or even sympathy to be interested in all for which they stood, and finally quarrel among themselves over the division of the spoils, and so make the helpless lands the scene of savage internal wars between Ptolemies and Seleucids, or whatever the intruders called themselves. Feet of iron and clay, said the prophet. Western culture, enforced by an irresistible army and destitute of a morale, seems never to have



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appealed much to the nations which were in process of being benefited by the treatment. The "lower" races, even the coloured races, have a claim to be heard, when European Empires regard themselves as having it in charge to carry to them the blessings of civilisation.

The prophet's verdict on the Greek Empire, however, interesting though it is, is of less significance than his larger view of how the world, from the time of Babylon to the period of the Seleucids, had been delivered over to power, and power the fitting emblems of which were ravening wild beasts. Lion and bear, leopard and eagle, they were alike in rapine and in cruelty, however different in degree. And, if he found himself able to substitute in certain cases the ram and the he-goat, the most fitting symbol remained to him a beast. The world had for generations been under the control and was still at the mercy, of unbridled appetite. Authority over men had never been in the hands of those who sought to use it for any end which could be described as human, far less as humane.

This was how his world presented itself once to the mind of a thoughtful and devout Jew. Power was lodged in the hands of men who were not able to measure, even if they had ever attempted to do it, the responsibility it brought, who never called a halt to ask what might be its source or for what ends it might be rightly employed. They were not conscious of anyone over them. Each triumphant chief seemed justified in saying, when he walked on the roof of his palace: Is not this great Babylon which I have built? And if he fell, the victim of his own pride, it was to give place to another of the like temper, who held similar aims. To the prophet, as he pondered the thing he saw, it seemed most sure that what such a

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world needed was, not to be patched here and altered there with little changes which left the commanding spirit of the whole drearily the same. What the world needed was to be constituted afresh on a new basis with new standards and new values. In his direct Jewish way he had referred the condition of things, as he for his part recognised them, to the sovereign will of God. He had declared that this succession of beastlike kingdoms maintained their existence through nothing less than the permission of the Almighty. And now in all his view of the coming age and his triumphant confidence in a better future he believed in the Almighty power and will to reconstitute even this universe. He who brought it into being and meant something high by it should make it possible for a new order of things to exist there; and He was about to do it. The prophet looked for no patched world, but for a new heaven and a new earth, the chief characteristic of which should be that authority was delivered by God into the hands of one like unto a son of man. Power should then be recognised supremely as a responsibility for which he who wielded it must be answerable to the giver, and he who wielded it should for his part desire nothing else. Power should also be exercised for ends which were in agreement with the character of Him who conferred it, even for human and gracious ends.

To the prophet all this seemed not merely possible, but sure and near at hand. God was on the point of doing this great thing.

Such a vision and hope are frequently interpreted as a mere counsel of despair, the natural refuge to which men turn who are conscious of possessing no political or social influence, and who, in dark and desperate days, throw

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up their hands and declare that any help which can come to the world must arrive, not from human effort, but by the direct intervention of the Most High. Then it becomes possible to contrast the apocalyptist with the prophet and to write as is done by Dr. Porter, "Present evils the prophets declared were due to past sins, not to demoniac agencies and not to a divine decree. The future is conditioned by the present. Men were called upon, not only to wait for it, but to determine it by present choices. On the other hand, the apocalyptic writers would reveal an absolutely fixed future, in which they saw, not the inevitable results of present conduct, but the violent reversal of present conditions. The sign that this fulfilment was near was not the likeness, but the unlikeness of the present to it, not the presence, but the absence of its powers and qualities."

In opposition to this sweeping verdict it would be possible and legitimate to point out that the prophets do not regard the present evils of their nation and the world as capable of being removed by present reform and national repentance. Instead they appear pronouncing an impending doom which no repentance or reform can avert.<sup>1</sup> But any discussion of that question would lead too far and probably would interest none but students of the prophetic literature. What is more easy to recognise and ought to be recognised is that, if the apocalyptic writers see present

<sup>1</sup> This is the truth which to my mind lies in the exaggerated emphasis laid by Marti and his school on the pre-exilic prophets being merely prophets of doom and having no promise of a blessed future. Any future which they predict can only come after doom, after the present order has been judged and renewed. Repentance on the part of Israel cannot avert the doom or bring the blessed future, but it can give the repentant his place in the new order God is bringing in.



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evils not to be due to past sins on the part of their nation, they saw no more than the truth ; and if in this matter they differed from the early prophets, then they were right and the prophets were wrong. As a matter of fact prophets and apocalyptists are in entire agreement, for Amos did not see the judgment to be due to the sins of Israel alone, otherwise he could not have denounced judgment on Moab and Edom. The evils of their time were not due to the faithlessness of Jewry, any more than the evils of this time are due to the sins of the elect or of the Church. The world in its past confusion and misery, as in its present confusion and misery, has always shown a situation which demands for its explanation some larger cause than the error or the unfaithfulness of any single body of men ; it demands for its renewal something more than the reform of a few. The world, as God has suffered it to exist, has been delivered over to a bewildering extent to the dominion of mere power, as unrighteously exercised as it has been unjustly gained. It was not the sin of Israel which had handed over the control of the West into the power of the Babylonian Empire, nor was it the sin of Israel which had delivered over, not merely Israel but the whole of Syria, to the foolish tyranny of Antiochus. The repentance of the nation, however perfect it might have been, would not have made the Seleucid Emperor change a policy which was persecuting Israel, precisely because the little nation refused to apostatise and worship a silly and fugitive idol. Israel was suffering, not for its sins, but for its faithfulness : and the apocalyptist was merely facing the facts of his world, as it presented itself to him, when he acknowledged these things, and said that, before the world would or could become a sweeter and saner place,



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something far more radical was needed than any reform which Jewry could set on foot. What was needed was for the world to accept new standards of God's sure appointment. To his mind there lacked nothing less than a complete revolution in the constitution of society, not in its outward forms, but in its inward spirit. Men must seek new ends and not merely seek the old ends in a fresh way.

Where the prophet differs from his predecessors and from many of his followers is that he does not seem to have anticipated any change in the course of nature. There is nothing here which corresponds with Isaiah's expectation of a change in the nature of the brutes, or which can be set alongside Ezekiel's replanting of Palestine with the returned exiles and increased fertility in the land to meet the needs of the increased population. It is necessary, of course, to remember that the man was not writing a treatise, but a tract for his time, and may not therefore have felt it needful to express all his thought. But what fills his mind, so far as we know it, is the disorder in human society; and what specially troubles him is to observe how control over their kind is given into the hands of men who do not conceive it as a trust, but who exploit it for the most selfish ends. They could do nothing else, since the gods they worship are the creation of their own mind. And to him authority needed to be constituted on a new basis, no longer on the fierceness of the lion, or the cunning of the panther, but on the human qualities in man. Everything ran back into the question of what men conceived to sit on the throne of Heaven. And when he said that God must work this great change, he seems to have recognised the mischief as so radical and so inveterate and so

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wide-spread as to make it beyond the power of the faithful to put it right. The mischief was rooted in something which it was beyond Israel's power to change, even the nature of man and his attitude toward his fellows. Whether, however, the change which he saw to be necessary could ever be brought about by a mere exercise of power on God's part, he does not appear even to have inquired. In this perhaps is seen the defect of all the Puritans and Predestinarians that they dwell so much on the will of God as to make nothing of the free-will of man. They fail to recognise that to compel men to submit, or to destroy men for refusing to submit, to a rule which is no doubt good for them, but which they are neither sane enough nor spiritual enough to welcome is questionably moral. Hence the vision of a new heaven and a new earth has not only bred mystics, but Fifth Monarchy men, who were prepared to dragoon the world into obedience to the will of God which they believed themselves to know. And the admiration for such short cuts by way of force does not disappear, even when men have ceased to believe in any God, whose will governs all things. Only its application becomes much more offensive, when men are dragooned into obedience by a committee. To rest such a good government on the absolute will of God has at least some dignity about it: to rest it on the vote of a body of men, which may change to-morrow, reduces it to an absurdity.

But to acknowledge the limitation in the prophet's method of cure does not imply, and ought not to bring with it, a failure to recognise his courageous facing of the width and depth of the difficulty, and of the significance of the task. At the root of the evil condition of the world, in his judgment, is a false view of what gives authority.

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So long as authority rests in hands which are merely strong and cunning it will continue to be exercised for base ends, and the kingdoms of the world will remain brute kingdoms, the fitting emblems of which are the lion, bear, panther and eagle, to which we may add the ape. And what is needed is no mere patchwork here and there, but a radical change in human standards and values. God must be manifested in and through human society and human life.

Further, while the prophet faced the tremendous gravity of the situation and the profound change which was needed, he never wavered in his confidence that the world was rational and was moving towards a real and worthy end. He saw the successive kingdoms, not merely passing in swift movement to their doom, but growing steadily worse ; he saw the cause in something beyond the wit or power of the faithful to remove. Yet to him this moving scene, where each kingdom runs its brief course and gives place to one equally transient, had not come into being without God's knowledge and God's will. God had a mind toward it all, and an attentive mind, for He had an ultimate end which He should bring in. To call such an attitude pessimistic is simply an abuse of language, but to describe it as an advance towards a philosophy of history demands careful recognition of its limitations. Certainly history was a real thing to the prophet, for it was destined to result in something which, since it could be described as the will of God, could be conceived as rational and spiritual. Yet, on the other hand, in the consummation when God brought in His final purpose, the pageant of history should vanish like the shadow of a dream. No man could so conceive of the manifold life of the nations, their toil and thought and pain, unless in his view they



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contributed nothing to the final end. All they had to contribute was the record of their futility, and so the record of the futility of every human endeavour, where men had forgotten God. St. Paul could write how "God shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all." The prophet regarded the nations as included in a common error which should vanish like a mist before the rising sun.

He has even deserted the attitude of the early stories which he borrowed from Babylon. In these is present the recognition that Babylonia, land of exile though it was, was an opportunity, in the peace of which, as a greater prophet taught, the exiles could find their peace. Daniel could serve it, and could serve his God in serving Babylon. His intelligence and his disciplined will could find an outlet in the place to which it had pleased God to bring him as a captive. It was then no wilderness, but a world, where a religious man could find a place through working with his kind at the common task of building up civilisation. There was a human task, in which Israel could joyfully take its share, and for which its faith peculiarly fitted it. Daniel could serve Babylon better than all its own wise men, and he could serve it better, because he was a devout Jew. This human life, where men dug gardens and traded and built homes and married and founded kingdoms, was a thing which called for the exercise of every faculty God gave. It could not be despised, as the shadow of a dream, nor feared, as a mere temptation to the righteous soul: it could be loyally served.

He has deserted also the hints of a wider thought in the earlier prophets. Amos could represent God bringing the Philistines from Caphtor precisely as He brought Israel



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out of Egypt, and so could conceive of the nations as controlled and guided by the hand which upheld Israel. Isaiah could describe Assyria as a rod in the hand of God for the chastisement of His people, and could thus give a heathen power a place in working out the purposes of the Almighty. Deutero-Isaiah was not afraid to call Cyrus directly the anointed of the Lord, and could declare that the servant of the Lord had a mission to the alien world, in carrying out which it should not break the bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. The broken and weak gleams of divine light in heathenism were to be nursed into life and fanned into flame by Israel's stronger faith. The prophet here has a darker view. He may think of the successive kingdoms as continuing through the permission of God, but he never speaks of them as owing their origin to the will of God ; indeed their origin is definitely contrasted with the source of the final kingdom. God Himself brings in the final kingdom, its head and representative appears in the clouds of heaven. But the beasts can be described as taking their origin from the abyss, the primæval chaos, over which God's Spirit brooded before an ordered world could be born, but which of itself could bring no order. It had been controlled, but was always capable of breaking loose and seeking to submerge the ordered creation. It was something destined to be finally subdued, when the new creation was ushered in at the consummation ; but, till then, it was ever seeking to draw within its power the world of seemly order which God had set up. Out of this the kingdoms had their rise, and they carry in them the taint of their origin.

This view clearly runs out into a form of dualism, and an explanation of its presence in Jewish thought is often

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found in the influence of Persia on the people. The explanation is tempting, since the Hebrew conception of God is strongly, even starkly, monistic, and since Jewry had by this time passed through the period of subjection to the Persian Empire. But perhaps it is not necessary to look outside Judaism itself for the presence of this element. Does any sincere system of thought, which tries to deal with the tremendous moral difficulties of this universe ever wholly escape from the liability of being accused of dualism? Has any thinker who held clearly the ultimate difference between good and evil ever succeeded in understanding how moral evil could come into being in time, or failed to leave the impression of carrying back the difference beyond time? Judaism, in spite of its strong monism, was only more liable to accept this attitude, because it had required to stand stiffly on its defence. It was difficult to find a real place for the heathen world which had so often and so long set itself against the distinctive life of Israel and against the mind of God in and through Israel.

Whatever its source, the effect of the attitude was grave on the whole Jewish morality. So long as the prophets believed that God could use even the heathen world for wise and gracious ends of His own, Judaism remained open to influences from the outside world, and conscious of its duty towards it. It could learn from its neighbour nations and it could desire and hope to teach them. But now, in the view of a large number of devout men, it became the Jew's first religious duty to present an impenetrable front to every influence, good or bad, which came from the outside. The world was bad in all its forms, was already judged by God, and was ripening to its doom ;

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and the duty of every loyal Jew was to hold aloof from it. And where the multiform life of humanity, its efforts and sacrifices, its hope and fear and joy and sorrow, its busy thought and eager discovery, its defeated and ever renewed attempts to interpret the meaning of the universe, appealed to the quick intelligence of the younger life trained in this temper, they must have answered the appeal with the uneasy sense that in the very deed they were breaking with the faith of their fathers, and must either have gone to the new world as rebels or joined in it with a troubled conscience.

But the temper of many a devout Jew incurred a deeper loss. Since he could have no real point of contact with this alien world which existed only through the inscrutable permission of God, but which, serving no worthy end, was doomed to be swept away in the consummation as though it had never been, the part of the Jew was to diminish his contact with it, and, while its control over him lasted, to endure it stubbornly and dumbly. Because it contributed nothing to him except a trial of his patience, he endured it with no hope of learning or gaining from it. He was required to endure until again, in the inscrutable will of God, all this phantasmagoria should vanish like the dream it was. He was called to live, not like an elder son among his brothers in their Father's house, but like a soldier on guard, waiting for his release. There could be no note of triumph in his patience, but a certain pride and a calm acquiescence in the awful but mysterious dispensation of Heaven which had permitted these things so to be. The deepened predestinarianism made Israel's morality ever more negative. A *morne* note pervades the book. O Israel, stand stoutly on guard to the end. This

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at least remains sure, that the end is near. God is about to relieve His faithful from their long watch.

We do grave injustice, however, to later Judaism, when we regard this as the whole of what it had to say on the subject. Judaism was always aware of the danger that lay in seeing only one principle, and of the need, for life and for thought, to rub one principle against another. Only, instead of watering down the two principles by an attempt to reconcile them, it loved to throw them up in vivid contrast. The corrective to Daniel was supplied by Jonah. There again we see the figure of Israel in exile among the nations, but there the ethic is positive from beginning to end. Israel has its heroic and fruitful place as the prophet among the nations, making known the will of the God whom it knows better than any other. It can serve the world, because the world has its place in God's thought. The result is a sunny lightheartedness which can poke fun at the idea of Israel trying to hide from its God's commission, and can break a jest at the prophet nation excusing itself from its task, because it has good reason to believe the task may prove too successful, since God is capable of having mercy on the repentant heathen. And it can close with the high note of the evangel, which is the knowledge that God, because He is the God Israel knows, will have mercy on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle.



## CHAPTER VII

### On the Fulfilment of Prophecy

ONE subject came largely to engross the minds of devout Jews at this period. The community which returned to Jerusalem had done so in the faith that their return had been, not only purposed by God, but foretold by His prophets. God had willed that it should be, and had even declared when and how it should be. Hence the men of the post-exilic time had their attention turned to the question of prophecy, and especially to the predictions which seemed to remain unfulfilled. Renewed in outlook and hope by the confidence that their return was the outcome of what God had made known to His servants, they searched their Scriptures to discover whether they might learn more for their future guidance. All the books after the return are full of quotations from earlier prophecies, which are occasionally cited, more often used without citation ; Joel, *e.g.*, is saturated in reminiscences of Ezekiel. Fugitive prophecies were collected and assigned, with more or less correctness, to authors. Extant prophecies were supplied with explanations, some of which have crept out of the margin where they originally stood into the text of our prophetic books, notably into that of Jeremiah. Additions were occasionally made at the close of collections of oracles, as has happened at the end of Amos. Men's

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minds were full of the old words and rich, uplifting sentences from the past which had brought light and courage in dark days of the people's history. It needed but a suggestion to set men diligently seeking to interpret for the help of the present the words of the past.

The habit has its virtues and is inevitable in every community which has any history. To dismiss any period which practises it as merely secondary is to ignore that wise and reverent-hearted men will never begin their thought on God's ways to His world as though good men had not thought on these subjects before them. But the habit has its dangers, and Judaism, through its isolation and its hardening doctrine of revelation, was peculiarly exposed to these. It is always so much easier to recall the words of a great past than to serve oneself heir to the attitude and the spirit of the men to whom some thought of God came as a very revelation. The one thing which cannot be inherited is experience, and yet without the experience it is hopeless to understand the words which embody a once vital experience.

Now the prophet of Daniel was a diligent student of his Scriptures. In particular he was eagerly interested in the prophets. Above all he was influenced by Ezekiel, with whom he seems to have felt a peculiar sympathy. His intimate acquaintance with the thought of the prophet of Babylonia, joined with his having incorporated in his book material which seems to belong to the same country, suggests that he may have had a close association with the powerful exiled community there and may even have sprung from the Euphrates valley. Daniel experiences a vision beside the Ulai (8<sup>a</sup>) or by the great river (10<sup>a</sup>), as Ezekiel had his revelation beside the Habor. To the Ulai

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he was carried in a trance out of Shushan the palace (8<sup>a</sup>), as Ezekiel was transported to Jerusalem. He was affrighted and fell on his face or fell into deep sleep (8<sup>17</sup>, 10<sup>8i</sup>), precisely like his predecessor. The angel addresses him as son of man (8<sup>17</sup>), which is the favourite title applied to Ezekiel. God sends to both prophets a man clothed in linen (10<sup>5</sup>, etc.), and both speak of Palestine as the glorious land (8<sup>9</sup>, etc.). Both have the same love for allegory, carried at times into somewhat incongruous detail. What, indeed, is said about his hero, Daniel (9<sup>a</sup>), is equally true about himself: "he understood by the books."

One passage in his favourite study specially exercised his thought. Jeremiah had been credited with a prophecy of how the captivity of Israel should come to an end after seventy years, and, it seems to have been anticipated, should culminate in the blessed end. Over this oracle the prophet represents Daniel as greatly troubled, which, of course, means that he himself was troubled by it. The prediction did not seem to have been exactly fulfilled nor had events followed the expected course. Yet the prediction stood in the sacred books and could not possibly fail. Daniel, accordingly, is represented as having received an interpretation from Gabriel, or by divine inspiration. The prediction, that is to say, was in itself infallible and must be true: the customary explanation was mistaken and capable of being changed.

The new explanation offered is that Jeremiah did not mean seventy literal years, but seventy week-years; in fact the prophet multiplied the period by seven. The longer term thus obtained he divided into three periods of seven, sixty-two and one, the closing week or seven years

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of which he regarded as the period of tribulation, which was to usher in the glorious end. Again inside this last period of tribulation he selected the desecration of the temple as the great event in which the wickedness of the world and the trial of the saints culminated, and he committed himself to the definite statement that it should endure for 1150 days. Apparently, however, the prediction did not square with the facts of history, for someone in 12<sup>th</sup> has corrected the 1150 into 1290, and at v. 12 a third hand has written 1335.

It is educative to draw attention to this procedure and its result, for it shows how the method followed by the prophet had no sooner appeared than it proved a fertile source of forced interpretation and of embarrassed efforts to explain away what had already been said. There was nothing in the prediction ascribed to Jeremiah which even suggested that the seventy years meant anything else than seventy years ; to multiply the years by seven smacked more of a desperate expedient to lengthen out the period than of a plain effort to understand the utterance. And the result to which it led, the arbitrary change of the 1150 days, might well have served as a warning as to how the very need of taking refuge in such expedients proved that there was something wrong in the point of departure. The effort to find in the words of Scripture, not large, guiding principles for life, but a decision about the dates of particular events, has always cramped the minds of those who practised it. And the groping after the precise sense of the time and times and half a time, while it has certainly witnessed to a certain noble reverence for the written word, has also led to a timid bondage to the letter and has brought with it, as its bitter fruit, forced interpretation



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and casuistical explanation. The effect has often been to give rise to the scoffing of the malicious and the distress of the devout.

Was not the spiritually helpful element in all the prophetic teaching about the end that from the time of Amos the men bade Israel prepare to meet its God, when He came? Then men recognised with a certain uplift of heart how it was the reality of the divine care which made it sure that God could not remain remote from His world and His people. Then too it was a profitable discipline with a humble heart to acknowledge what it was in His world and in oneself which made it inevitable that the first effect of His coming must be judgment, and with a repentant spirit to learn to welcome even His judgment. But when men sincerely think on these things, the exact period of the awful coming drops back into unimportance. One may venture to say that, the more men sink their thoughts in these things, which means, the more they think about God, the more humbly and gladly do they acquiesce in the saying that the times and the seasons God has kept in His own power. When men are reaching out to think of God's will for them, they know how good it is for them and all the world that the decision of the end should be in His mighty and wise and fatherly hands.

When the prophet began from the other end, from the question of dates, he began to give way to human craving after satisfaction of curiosity and even after sensation. It is so much easier to be interested in the period when the Lord is to come than to remain sensitive to the moral condition through which alone His coming can be a blessed and a welcome event. And the former interest is not in itself religious at all; a man need not be a religious man

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in order to be interested in the exact period of so wondrous an event. When Amos concentrated attention on the preparation to meet God, when he urged what it was which made His coming necessary, and spoke of the standard He should then apply and the values He should then make enduring, he was busy with a religious question. Being religious, it was also ultimate. It lifted men's thoughts above the needs of any temporary condition or the exigencies of any political situation to the demands of an absolute righteousness. This prophet was calculating dates. Now when men limit their interest in the Kingdom of God to the time when it shall arrive, and devote their whole thought to calculation of its period, the position is apt to imply that they already know everything which needs to be known as to its character and its effects. They grow absorbed in a mere incident connected with it and careless about its essential nature. Men, on the other hand, who keep their minds intent on the rich content of the kingdom and on all which it must involve, grow to understand it better in itself. When men ponder the things of God, they learn to covet, not what they once expected, but what God teaches them to desire. Having found Him who alone can send the kingdom at any time, they find strength to meet the claims He makes on their devotion, courage to bear what would otherwise be intolerable demands and sacrifices, patience to endure, being confident of a better end, freedom to live their own lives in a world which has no interest in their ideals and hopes. They live by the new values which the presence of God continually reveals to the expectant heart. They expect the salvation of the Lord, not out of Babylon, but in Babylon, and they receive it.

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But the men who devoted undue attention to pondering the times and calculating the seasons were side-tracked. And like all the men who are side-tracked, they drifted into a little esoteric world of their own, having their own methods of interpretation and their own shibboleths. The beginning of such a situation can be traced in the book of Daniel. Thus the prophet divides his people into three classes and shows his bias in the lines of division he draws. There is the hellenising party, whom he sometimes calls "the children of the violent among thy people" (11<sup>14</sup>), sometimes denounces as "them that forsake the holy covenant" and as easily seduced by flattery (11<sup>30-32</sup>): there is the multitude, which, like all such partisans, he does not trouble to characterise at all (11<sup>33</sup>); and there are the wise or the teachers. These last, in spite of all their sufferings for the cause, shall lead the unthinking multitude to right ways (11<sup>33</sup>). Some of the wise shall fall before the trial, but, since they are the elect, their fall shall only effect their purification (11<sup>35</sup>); but the hope of Israel's religion rests with them, and therefore, when all is finished and the great day dawns, they shall receive the special honour which is their due (12<sup>3</sup>). Meantime they have the supreme consolation of recognising how to them is given a knowledge which is withheld from others (12<sup>10</sup>). All this betrays the note of the esoteric clique, separating itself with a touch of disdain from the body of its people and pluming itself a little on its superior *γνῶσις* (*gnosis*). Its taint is its intellectualism; its members are the wise. The strong, ethical and spiritual factors which underlay and formed the strength of the expectation of the Kingdom of God, are threatening to fall into the background, and in their place are beginning to appear a superior knowledge

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of matters which may be learned without much awe before God, an esoteric tradition with its love for the use of symbols which need a special training in order to be understood, an ever increasing surrender to human curiosity rather than an insistence on repentance and the presence of God.



## CHAPTER VIII

### One like unto a Son of Man

IN every effort to understand this much debated phrase it is wise and necessary to keep two things clearly in mind. On the one hand, what is to be looked for is the meaning of the expression to the prophet and his contemporaries. The vision had a very strong influence on all subsequent thought on the subject. Thus it appears again in the Similitudes of Enoch, and, since Enoch was well known to and much studied by the early Christians, it passed thence into the thought of the Church. Inevitably we are unable to study the passage without a certain bias from its subsequent history. Yet it is necessary to get rid, if possible, of all such bias, and to try at least to read it in the light of the book of which it forms a part, and of similar predictions or expectations from preceding literature. On the other hand, it is wise to remember that we are dealing with a symbol. The phrase has the vagueness which attaches to every symbol, a vagueness which may have formed part of its attraction to the mind which conceived it. Therefore we may not treat it, as we treat a definite, concrete statement in certain other books.

If, now, the one like unto a son of man was intended for a messianic figure, I can see no reason for concluding that the more supernatural character which is here supposed

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to be given to the figure of Messiah was due to the idea of God having become more transcendent in the later age of Judaism. What suggests such a view is the use made of it in Enoch. The vision seems to be the basis of the messianic expectation in the Similitudes, and there undoubtedly the supernatural nature of Messiah is strongly emphasised, for the son of man is described as coming forth in the last days from the secret places of heaven where he has existed from the beginning. It is tempting to conclude that in Enoch we have the culmination of a process which had already begun in Daniel. Since God is conceived at an infinite distance from the world, He can only act on it through an intermediary: Messiah is the intermediary, vaguely described in Daniel as one *like* unto a son of man who comes in the clouds, blossoming in Enoch into a being beyond all time. Thus the thought of God as transcendent has brought about its inevitable result. It is possible and natural to make this connection but it may be wiser, apart from other questions thus raised, to interpret Daniel from his predecessors rather than from his successors. Now Isaiah already described his messianic figure in terms,—Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace—which express, even more clearly than Daniel's, the supernatural character of his person and office. He was Immanuel, because through him God was present among men.<sup>1</sup> Yet Isaiah never set God at an infinite distance from a sinful world; his entire

<sup>1</sup> The point has not quite so much force for those who refuse these famous passages to Isaiah. Yet strong force remains, since even they will hardly date what they are compelled to regard as additions to Isaiah later than the book of Daniel. It is enough to recognise that such a view of Messiah was current, whether Isaiah or another gave it currency.

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theology and prophetic activity are based on his conviction that God has stooped to cleanse him from his sin.

Nor does the fact that the one like unto a son of man receives a very slight function and occupies practically no independent position in the new age, present any real bar to his having been a messianic figure. As a matter of fact, Messiah is endowed with very slight functions and occupies no independent position throughout the Old Testament. He is never described as bringing in the new age, he merely presides over it after God has brought it in, for to all the prophets salvation is only of the Lord. Messiah's sole function seems to be to continue, and in a measure to guarantee the character of the kingdom, when once it has been set up by the act of God. He is present strictly as the representative of God. His presence in the new kingdom is the sufficient proof that it possesses the character which makes it possible for God through His representative to dwell directly in it as He could not dwell in the former age. Just because it was no part of his task to bring about the new world, because, indeed, his function in connection with it was so slight, the figure of Messiah appears only in some of the pictures of the consummation, while it is absent from others. Several prophets passed him by altogether, because they counted it sufficient to say that God would bring in the end. Since he merely guarantees the new age after it has been set up, any apparently independent functions with which he was endowed were confined to his task of preventing the new kingdom from falling back into the condition of the old. The prophet in Daniel, accordingly, follows the line of past thought about Messiah, when he commits the government into the hands of one like unto a son of man



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and sets him at the head of the kingdom which God has set up.

But is the prophet thinking of an individual figure at all? Is he not rather thinking of a figure who sums up in his person the characteristics of the new age in contrast with the old? There is much to be said in favour of such a view which would reduce the one like unto a son of man to a mere symbol. Thus it is stated immediately afterwards that the kingdom is to be delivered over to the saints, which would naturally suggest a desire to contrast two different types of government and to underline the new basis on which authority is now to rest. On the other hand, however, it is not easy to see why, unless an individual figure was intended, the one like unto a son of man was described as coming in the clouds and as able to stand before God. Nor is it natural to think of the kingdom being delivered over to the saints, if by this is meant that they as well as the other shall exercise authority in it. The deliverance of the kingdom to the saints suggests the sense that it is to be instituted in their interests and for the ends which they have loyally served, while the authority among them is committed to the one like unto the son of man.

What seems best to combine the individual and collective traits which are both present is the suggestion that the figure is meant for the angel, who is representative of the kingdom of Israel or of the saints. Hence too we obtain a natural explanation of the curious phrase, one *like unto* a son of man. He who was to sum up in himself the characteristic features of the new kingdom was to have the human interests and sense of holding his authority from God, which had been utterly lacking in the kingdoms, the



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emblems of which were wild beasts. Yet he was to be more than man, because a mere man could not guarantee the existence of a kingdom which, instead of being transient like the others, was the final expression of God's will on the earth.

What prompted the prophet to employ such a phrase at all, the reason, that is to say, which prevented him from simply saying that the kingdom was given over into the hands of the saints to be administered by them, probably was his strong conviction that the new condition owed its origin and its character directly to God. We fail to be just to his thought, when we think of him as merely glorifying his own race, or as governed in his view of the future by national exclusiveness or Jewish bias. When the saints, who are of course to him the faithful Jewish party, are given any authority, it is because they are the saints, not because they are Jews. They, alone in the world and even in Israel, have witnessed for a higher source of authority than mere force. It is significant to note again that the prophet nowhere shows any sympathy with the party which led the Maccabean rising. Indeed it is more natural to hold that, when he expects the deliverance to come solely by the intervention of God, and when he looks for a deliverer who is to come in the clouds of heaven, he is directly opposed to the ideals which animated the revolt. In our ignorance of the conditions which prevailed in the Judaism of the period, it would be too much to say that he was uttering a polemic against the movement; but it is not too much to say that both his figure which appears in the clouds, and his favourite figure of Daniel who only rebels against Babylon when Babylon interferes with conscience and whose rebellion never goes beyond

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passive resistance, form a strong contrast to the Maccabean heroes. What he claims for his nation—and even this he only claims for a section of Israel—is no more than what was strictly true, *viz.*, that the Jewish people was constituted on a basis which was wholly different from the basis of any other people, since it was constituted on its faith and its obedience to the revealed will of God. As such, but only as such, it shall pass over into the new kingdom. The prophet seeks to express this fundamental feature in his thought by insisting that Messiah, who is the head and representative of the new kingdom, shall also represent the little community, in so far as it expresses the will of God. And he further emphasises the final character of the reconstituted society of the future, by saying that its leader came from God and represented nothing less sure than the will of God.

One may venture to feel more confident that the prophet had entirely broken with nationalism, because he shows himself quite conscious of the presence of unworthy elements in his own nation. It is unnecessary to repeat the proofs ; it is only necessary to recognise that, from his point of view, he could not anticipate any endurance, far less any authority, for men whom he counted unfaithful. For men, such as these, to hold authority would not necessarily be an improvement on a kingdom like Babylon, which was capable of being described as a head of gold. And a kingdom, which contained the indefinite and mutually warring ideals of the two elements which composed the community of his day, could have no permanence.

The prophet belonged to the type of Jew, who, after the Hasmonean kingdom had been set up and had entered on its career of inevitable and tragic compromises,

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violently opposed it and all its works from inside Judaism. His real successors in his higher ideals were the men who wrote the Psalms of the Pharisees. He stood for a sweeter, because a more unworldly thing than the Hasmoneans attained, a kingdom which was human because it was also divine, human because it came from no man but from no one less than God.

**Part III**  
**REVELATION**





## CHAPTER IX

### **The Book of Revelation, its Author and Date**

THE writer represents himself as belonging to Asia Minor and as having been banished to the island of Patmos because of his Christian faith and activity. Apparently he was sufficiently prominent to draw the attention of the authorities, and his public teaching or conduct had made it seem advisable to remove him, for there is no evidence of widespread persecution which might have caused the Imperial officials to banish a private Christian. He writes of trials having already begun in a sporadic way, and has no doubt but that these are the scattering drops which prelude a deluge; yet he never writes of the whole Church being subject to persecution. Some vehement expression of his opinions on the policy of the Empire in connection with the Emperor-worship may well have brought him into collision with the authorities in the place where he was living. At the same time his equally strong conviction of the Christian's duty being summed up in passive resistance may also explain why he was called to suffer no more than banishment. He was no fifth monarchy man of whom the authorities must make an example; yet he occupied a sufficiently influential position to make the men who were responsible for good order well content to get him out of the way.

Evidently the writer was well acquainted with the condition of the Christian communities, especially in the

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seven towns to which he sent his first messages. For the letters contain frequent references to local circumstances, but make the references so naturally and easily that the precise sense occasionally eludes us. "Satan's throne," the "woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess," "the works of the Nicolaitans" refer to matters evidently well-known to writer and recipients, and needed no explanation to prove their ruinous character; but they have left the modern reader in the dark. At the same time, he writes like one who has no well-defined official relation to these Churches. His description of himself, "your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus," scarcely suggests one who was the founder or the professional teacher of any of the communities which he addresses. His right to speak to them was something which he need not claim, because it was admitted by all, because his having fulfilled his duty had brought him into troubles, about which, since he was convinced that they would spread more widely, he desired fully to speak.

There seems no sufficient reason for questioning this plain account of the origin of the book. Apocalypses were, it is true, frequently issued pseudonymously, and the name John might in this case be a pseudonym. But why add the gratuitous detail about a banishment to Patmos? There is no evidence of any well known martyr having been confined in the island, whose borrowed name was able to give authority to anything. Besides, the writer does not give the impression of being diligent to claim any authority; he rather writes like one who feels sure of having all the audience he desires.

The exact period in which the book was produced has

## The Book of Revelation

been the subject of considerable debate, into which it is fortunately unnecessary here to enter. It is enough to say that certain general considerations point to the period of the reign of Domitian, 81-96. Thus there has been and is persecution, but it is still sporadic, at least in Asia Minor. Rome is drunk with the blood of the saints, which appears to refer to the sudden cruelties practised by Nero, and even to indicate their strictly local character. As yet, however, the Christian communities with which John is familiar have not suffered on any general scale, and have not suffered through any defined policy on the part of the Empire. Yet the writer is conscious of the fact—indeed it is his consciousness of this fact which prompts him to write—that this condition is already threatened with change. He recognises that the Empire, true to the principles for which it stands, must declare itself hostile to the young community which has risen up in its midst ; and in the new emphasis on the deification of the Emperor he sees the declaration at once of the characteristic trait in the Empire and of its inevitable clash with the Christian faith. Sooner or later—in John's view immediately—the Empire will demand the entire allegiance of its subjects, in soul as well as in body. And like Daniel, Revelation is full, from beginning to end, of the question as to where a man's ultimate allegiance is due. Now such an attitude agrees best with the increasing tendency to deify the Emperors which came to clear expression about the period of Domitian.

Again, there can be little question but that the John of the book of Revelation was a Jew. His language is enough to prove it. The book has always been recognised by students to be characterised by a style, a syntax, almost



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a vocabulary which are unique in the New Testament. And Dr. Charles has recently pointed out in a singularly convincing way how easily the peculiarities of style and syntax can be explained, when it is recognised that the author, while he wrote in Greek, was thinking in Hebrew, or at least was deeply influenced in his methods of thought by Hebrew. Some of his peculiar forms of expression can be best understood, when his Greek is translated back into Hebrew. And several of these forms of expression are not casual or sporadic, but recurrent and habitual in his manner of thought.

While, however, John was a Christian Jew, he was a very different type of Christian Jew from the Apostle Paul. To contrast the two and recognise their different ways of approaching Christianity is to discover the remarkable variety and fertility of the Jewish mind, before it stereotyped itself after its breach with Christianity. John leaves the impression of having passed into the Christian Church almost naturally, at least without the tremendous intellectual and spiritual struggle which attended St. Paul's conversion. The Pauline antitheses, of law and grace, of flesh and spirit, are not present in his book. The problem of Judaism, why it ever existed, what God meant when He not only suffered it to be but brought it into being, which St. Paul discusses at length in the Epistle to the Romans, is no problem here. To John, Judaism is Christianity, it has found itself in Christ. St. Paul studied at the feet of Gamaliel and was trained in the Rabbinic methods: John has been bred in another school of thought with a very different atmosphere and attitude, he is a prophet.

In his own school he is no novice but has been a diligent student. He has read widely among and thought carefully

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over the apocalypses, which to him include the prophecies. He borrows as freely from Ezekiel for his imagery and his thought, as he does from the later apocalyptists. But most of all he borrows from Daniel. That is natural, because to both the question life is setting before each loyal spirit resolves itself into this—are we Jews citizens of Babylonia or merely *gerim*, sojourners, there; are we Christians merely citizens of the Roman Empire, or do we look for a city? John, however, does not confine his borrowings to canonical books, for he has taken over and incorporated material which came from very different sources. Passages like 7<sup>1-8</sup>, which describes the numbered saints as made up from eleven of the original tribes of Israel, or like 11<sup>1-13</sup>, which may have been written in connection with the fall of Jerusalem, have plainly had their origin in Jewish circles. The description of the woman and the dragon, (c. 12) ultimately springs from a more remote source, and is very similar in character to other fragments from Babylonian and Persian myth which are scattered throughout the book. In these last, descriptions which took their rise from observation of the forces of nature are now applied to Christ. How and by what means material of this character reached John it is not easy to determine. He may have taken over with a new application matter which he learned from the weird faiths prevalent in Asia Minor. He may have used forms of thought which were in circulation among the men for whom he was called to work, and may have sought to commend their new faith to them by showing how Christianity offered the real content of what these things could only hint. But it is equally possible that the source on which he drew was his native Judaism, which had already made use of the Babylonian

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cosmogonies. And certainly the frequency of the allusions and the easy, unembarrassed way in which they are introduced point to their presence in his own thought rather than to a deliberate and purposed borrowing. Personally, also I am much impressed by the presence in the seventh chapter of Daniel of material which undoubtedly shows close affinity with the Babylonian mythology and which shows Judaism at an early date willing to borrow largely thence for its own apocalyptic thought. In order to discover the origin of these elements, it may not be necessary to go further than Judaism itself.<sup>1</sup>

Wherever it came from, however, and by whatever route it arrived, the fact that the prophet could and did use this material in what was emphatically a tract for the times, gives an interesting and instructive insight into the kind of literature and the world of thought on which the early Church in Asia Minor was nourishing its religious life. John would never have made use of these sources in a book which was meant for popular use, unless they were influencing the minds of the men to whom and for whom he wrote. If they had merely been intelligible to himself and much pondered by himself, he would not have drawn upon them so largely, when he bent himself to the task of directing the minds of his fellow-Christians. Yet it is far from being the case that John did no more than collect a quantity of current eschatological material into a heterogeneous heap with no unifying principle and

<sup>1</sup> All students are aware that Gressmann believes it possible to derive all the content of Hebrew eschatology from the ideas current in the Euphrates Valley. It may be worth while underlining that the situation here is very different. Here we have to do with applying to different purposes the already fully developed myths of Babylonia.



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no central thought. However imperfectly welded the component parts are—and it is useless to deny the incongruity of certain elements and the looseness of connection throughout—the whole is yet the author's own. It bears the impress of one mind, and above all is forced throughout to serve a single purpose. Sometimes the forcing is more palpable than the success, but this often brings out the author's purpose more clearly. He has seen one common thought which to him gives a unity to the scheme. Whatever materials he employs to embody his convictions, and from whatever alien or recondite source he draws them, the convictions are very real and are all his own. There has come to him the liberating and triumphant certainty that the end of creation is sure, because it is and has ever been in the mind of God. And in these last days God has made it known to men in the life and passion of Jesus Christ. He, in His meek and perfect lowliness, and above all in His submission to death, has quieted and strengthened the hearts of the men who trust in Him. They can through Him do more than endure to the uttermost; for, seeing victory near and sure, they can rejoice. This is the One whom John expects and bids his fellow-Christians expect. The symbols he uses to express the sureness of Christ's coming are sometimes artificial enough, and are often borrowed without much regard to whether they adequately express his thought. But He who is the centre round which the symbols are gathered is the Lord of all Christian men.

Here then we can recognise an interesting illustration of the way in which Christianity found its approach to certain Jews, and of an attraction it exercised on certain minds in Judaism. Here is a writer, and Christian teacher, himself steeped in apocalyptic; and he writes a tract for



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the times which is crammed with references and phraseology taken from apocalyptic, in the clear expectation that the majority of those to whom he writes will be able to understand what he wants to say. The material is familiar to him and them, and they find it easy to construe their new faith in these terms.

Now the first thing which is noteworthy here in connection with apocalypse is its wide prevalence in the Judaism of the period. Not only is John able to use its peculiar language and ideas with the confidence that they will be understood by his readers, but some of the most characteristic products of Jewish apocalyptic thought appear in the first century. Yet the movement is preparing to shift its camp. This outcome of Judaism, which lent it a somewhat unique character and which had flourished so luxuriantly there for at least a couple of centuries, began to die out in the soil which had given it birth. Judaism slowly surrendered the production of apocalypses; and, as it hardened toward the close of the century in its opposition to Christianity, it ceased to value, because it ceased to understand, the apocalypses it had already produced. On the other hand, apocalyptic language is found in the mouth of the Lord Himself, traces of such thought are scattered through many of the New Testament writings, and the last great apocalypse is written by a Christian prophet and eagerly welcomed by the Christian Churches of Asia Minor. It seems a natural inference that the men who had found spiritual nurture in these elements of the Jewish faith passed over into Christianity.

One reason seems clear, natural and simple. Christianity carried certain elements out of Judaism and profoundly influenced its mother religion by draining it of those who

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found themselves in agreement with the new faith. It further accentuated in those who remained Jews all the methods of thought which were least in agreement with the Christian attitude to life and the Christian thought about God. Judaism drew back into the shell of the law. It taught more rigidly than ever that only by observing the law could any man make himself capable of approach to God. What was implied in the Rabbinic attitude was a self-limitation on the part of God. He could only come to man along the lines which He had already laid down for Himself in His law. But for Him to intervene directly in human life or in human history or in the constitution of the world became not so much a heresy as an impossibility. The Rabbis inevitably began to turn away from every thought of God which represented Him as acting by way of intervention, in the sinner to convert him, in the world to renew it.

Christianity, on the other hand, was a rediscovery of the personality of God; and its God was a free spirit. He could reach down to renew a man in the spirit of his mind and to set him in a new relation to the world and to everything. To a man who believed that this had happened to himself, it did not seem at all incredible that God should put His mighty hand on all the course of human things to turn history into a new channel. It did not seem impossible for Him to overturn the course of the world and make it all anew. Fundamentally the apocalyptic thought was evangelical, not legalistic. ✓

## CHAPTER X

### The Messages to the Seven Churches

JOHN addresses his message to Asiatic Christendom as represented by the Churches in seven leading towns. His use elsewhere of the number seven makes it clear that he thinks of these as representatives of a larger whole. Whether he was governed in his selection of Thyatira, Sardis and the rest by the Churches there being the most important in the province, or was prompted to write about communities with the internal condition of which he was best acquainted, he does not limit what he has to say to them. His utterance was intended for, and was suited for, all his fellow-Christians in Asia Minor. Yet the fact of the prophet naturally selecting seven actual Churches to be recipients of his message and dwelling in detail on the conditions which he knows to exist there shows how there is not before his mind any conception of a great Church, knit together by a definite organisation or holding a common confession. He thinks of local and sporadic communities, scattered in separate towns, which have sprung into life, here through some teacher's activity, there through the zeal of an individual Christian. The Churches have not yet organised themselves or defined the duties of their officials ; far less have they succeeded in, even if they have thought of, linking themselves together for common action by outward representatives. Their faith does not appear to have any clearly framed statement, it is indeed as much Jewish in character as Christian.



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The new element which has come into it is the declaration, Jesus is the Messiah. As such, He has secured for them the forgiveness of their sins and a direct access to God, and, as such, He will speedily return to establish the kingdom of Heaven. But what the kingdom is to mean and to bring, these believers have still to learn in its fulness. What constitutes its difference from the kingdom of Heaven of which they have heard or read much in the older Jewish prophecies, they have not clearly recognised. What they definitely recognise is that Jesus is to bring it in and to be its head. Jesus to them is lord of conscience and of life.

Evidently they are not yet provided with men who can teach them the new way of faith and conduct. The future in the Churches depends greatly on the prophets, whose qualification consists in their being directly in contact with God. Through them the Spirit of God speaks in order to guide and instruct the women and men who have separated themselves from the world to follow Christ. The words of these teachers are received as God's words. It is not difficult to recognise how perilous and unstable a situation had thus been created, since it became easy for Jezebel who called herself a prophetess to win a hearing in Thyatira, and for the teaching of Balaam to command a following at Pergamum. The faith was undefined, a Christian moral habit was not in existence, any man might claim a prophetic gift. Perhaps the one thing which made such a situation tolerable was that a large number of the converts came from Judaism and had already learned some moral discipline and instinct of union during the long years of the diaspora.

What held them together was their common faith in Jesus as Lord, and their expectation of a common destiny,



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both of which meant a common task. They were seeking a better country and were strangers to the hopes of the world around them, because they lived by a standard which the world rejected, and expected something which their world could not give. Already there had come, to bind them together, pressure from the outside, and it showed signs of growing more intense. For their world, which had at first ignored their existence, thinking them but one more of the weird sects which pullulated and died in the province where East and West met, had now awaked to their extraordinary claims and dangerous pretensions. Tribulation for the Name had begun to sift them and to drive those who remained faithful into a sense of their close brotherhood and of their common need for guidance and help on the new road, the trials of which they were being forced to recognise. He who wrote to them wrote as their brother and partaker of the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus. He had the right which came from having shared the great hope and from having suffered for it. He knew the brotherhood and the humility which were strengthened by that experience.

But he claimed another right, the right of the prophet who had special knowledge of the mind of their common Lord. He had received a revelation, which it was his privilege and his duty to send for their comfort and rebuke. It is interesting to notice how on several occasions he drops into the use of the method, inherited from earlier prophets, of describing his revelations as having come from Jesus through an angel, the *angelus interpres*. But he does not know very well, any more than his predecessors in the Old Testament, what to do with this intermediate figure, who appears and vanishes from the scene. In the Old

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Testament period the strong Jewish monism could not give the angel any independent rôle. John in turn could not make use of him except as a borrowed lay figure, because he was too conscious how near God had come to him and to all men. He was too convinced of the presence of his Master and of His willingness to help, to think naturally of any intermediary.

The prophet knew how grave the need of the Churches was ; indeed he knew the gravity of the situation better than they did. They were fully conscious of the danger which had arisen from the outside, of the menace which had begun and was threatening to increase. John also recognised this, as indeed he had good reason, since he was suffering under it ; and he was sure of the present suffering being no more than a foretaste. Hence he bade Christian men recognise that there was no possibility for any one now to escape. The day for compromise was past ; the lists were set and the battle must be to the death. Every message to the Churches closes with the same reminder ; to him that overcometh will I give. Very definitely he urged men to be sure that the tribulation, far from being a passing incident, was to grow worse. Only, and with this he began his entire message, the time is at hand : only, and with this he closed his entire message, Maranatha, the Lord cometh. Christ's servants shall not have long to endure, for He whom they serve is about to appear and to make manifest the meaning of their waiting and their suffering. What they have and shall have to endure is not only shortlived, it has all been appointed of God. They are not in the hands of a blind chance, they are under the government of the God and Father of their Lord Jesus Christ. Because He has determined the trial for His wise

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ends and in His perfect counsel, it is unavoidable, and no man need seek to escape from it. But because He has determined it for their discipline, it is also endurable and no man need say that he cannot endure it. When it is borne with cheerful patience, the patience of Christ, it will issue in the best gift even God can give to any servant, a greater nearness and likeness to Him who suffered more than they for the ends of the same kingdom to which He has brought them. Every message to the Churches closes, not only with a promise to him that overcometh, but with the promise of an intimate and individual gift from Jesus Himself.

But the prophet discerned a graver danger to which the men whom he addressed were blind. He looked for the coming of the Lord, but he knew the character of Him who was to come and the ends for which He was to come. Who could welcome or even endure the coming, not in the world first, but in the Church? One by one, he passed in review the Churches he knew and tested them all, bringing to bear on their actual condition the light of Him who walks ever in white among the lamps of heaven. One by one, he touched on their loss of the first love, on the works begun but unfulfilled before God, on the lukewarm water the only use of which was to make him who tried to drink it sick. Even with these things present among them, they might be able to win through the trials from Rome, but with these things could they bear and welcome the coming of their Lord? For He was coming, not merely to the world, but to the Church; He was coming to the Church first.

So the last prophet returns to the message of the first. Before there could be any comfort or any promise, there



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was the renewal of Amos' summons ; "because I will do thus unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." Judgment must begin at the house of God. Yet the prophet has not been searching among old words to apply them to present conditions ; he has been doing a more uncommon thing, he has himself been enduring the testing companionship of his Lord in the isle that is called Patmos.

I have tried to point out the reason which had led the later prophets to make judgment begin with the world, instead of with Israel. They had to deal with an accepted and established system of morals, and with a Church which had separated itself and now stood before the world for certain religious convictions. They naturally slipped into the position of identifying the Church with its ideal, and of declaring that all who stood for these principles should be delivered in the day of the Lord. But the Christian prophet is dealing with a new thought about God and His kingdom, and with a new basis for morality ; he is dealing with principles which have not yet won their way to clearness. He has also to do with a less sharply defined and less homogeneous community. The women and men who compose the infant Churches in Asia Minor are new converts, unconfirmed in and uncertain of their faith, indefinite in their morality. There is no temptation for him to identify the ideal with the actual. What holds the Church together is still its ideal, not its machinery of creed, organisation, discipline. Hence he can see how the ideal is not only what holds the Church together, but is its supreme test. It will be more than a century before the great Church arises, articulate, well knit together, with a system and a creed. As soon as it has come into conscious existence, its theologians will proclaim "*extra*



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*ecclesiam nulla salus*," which, being translated, means that judgment does not begin at the house of God, for all who are provided with its means of grace pass over into the new order in the day of the Lord. The ideal will then be regarded as comfortably realised in the ordinary compromises of an existing institution. Few things show, more clearly than John's opening messages, how vividly the early prophets realised the novelty of all which Jesus demanded. He was asking men to live for and to live by a righteousness which was greater than the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees; He was demanding the little more, the righteousness which was richer than a cautious avoidance of what was wrong. The freshness and greatness of the Christian claim made the prophets feel continually that it was a perpetual test of a Christian's loyalty rather than a pillow.

Besides the Church was still out in the open, steering its course over an uncharted sea by the stars. It had not yet formed the habits which should enable its members in every difficult case to determine their duty without casting back on the mind of their Founder. Yet it was living in a world which was continually demanding prompt decision in difficult cases of conscience. In Thyatira the association of Christian men with their fellow workmen in some local guild or trade-union was involving the men in certain heathen practices or at least in what might appear to be approval of heathen rites. What ought a strong Protestant to do in the days of the Reformation, when his guild authorised grants for the celebration of mass in their shrine at the local Cathedral or in their parish church? What ought a loyal Christian to do, if his trade union was mixed up with an annual sacrifice to Jupiter? Was it enough to stay away, or must he add a definite protest, since his

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contribution to the funds helped the expenses? Similar questions must have emerged continually in an old society which was based directly on religious sanctions, and, whenever the questions emerged, they demanded an instant answer. The matter could not be postponed and discussed, for to do nothing at all was really to decide. Yet these people had nothing out of the past, no inheritance from Christian experience to guide or help them to a decision. Their Church had not been long enough in existence to have succeeded in evolving those habits which slowly shape themselves in every living and functioning community, and which give rise to an atmosphere and custom of thought that guide men almost instinctively in determining on any new difficulty that suddenly emerges. Some of them were only partly free from the immemorial restraints and regulations which had gathered during the generations round their Jewish faith. Others had but imperfectly flung off the superstitious awe which clung around heathen rites that they had outwardly abandoned for ever. They were thrown out to live their new lives by the demands of their new faith. That is a condition of things in which men need to be made conscious of how their Christian faith is a daily test of their obedience rather than a pillow.

The strain on the men was severe and unremitting. Christ, said the prophet, was at the door, knocking for admission, demanding entrance to search their lives as with a lighted candle. Nothing could be hidden from the eyes of Him to whom they had committed themselves. But as great as the strain, in the judgment of the prophet, was the comfort. It braced and heartened men to live in this fashion, for it brought Christ near them and renewed

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the sense of His personal care. Each individual soul could venture to count itself of significance before God. The obscure worries of conscience in the country-towns over meats offered to idols, the debates over the right conduct of local guild feasts, the way men bore themselves toward the Empire in the person of its magistrates and priests, were of profound importance, for Christ cared how His servants faced them. No one of these things was obscure, for Jesus asked about fulfilled or unfulfilled works : no one of them was insignificant, for it was an answer given to God's demand on their patience. The men had no regulated habits from the past to fall back upon and so find a ready-made decision, they had no strong community life to lighten the responsibility of their individual choice. They must fall back on their Lord, on what they knew of His mind, and on a humble self-devotion to His will. The inevitable result was an extraordinarily vivid sense of the reality of His presence. The personal life of each Christian man and Church could be braced and dignified and made sincere by the constant effort to realise and live after their Lord's will. The issue was to find Christ's intimate care for each soul which was thus striving to make Him a reality and a guide for conduct. They had lifted up their hearts to believe that there was only one end which they could seek ; and they had turned to seek it with much heavy anxiety but in all sincerity. Now their life, which had been set for eternal things, lifted itself up as something which was in God's thought from the beginning, and which He would make enduring in the end. It was not something which they had thought out or discovered for themselves ; it was God's mind about them, when they came into this world at all. As the prophet says in a



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vivid phrase to the Laodiceans, "Christ is the beginning of the creation of God." When he said that, he was not trying to evolve a logos doctrine about the person of the Redeemer ; indeed, he was not thinking chiefly of the nature of his Lord. He was speaking about a reality of experience. When men live by the demands and in the comfortable presence of Jesus, they find themselves living a life which they have not to think out for themselves with all its content supplied by their own choice, but a life which was God's purpose with them before the world was. It is the reality which has made predestination able to survive all the philosophers who have proved it absurd and all the moralists who have demonstrated its conflict with sound morals.

And, as the life they were living in the towns of Asia Minor went back to the purpose of God, so the future which they were to anticipate was coming to them according to the will of God. The time of the end was at hand and God, who called them out of the world, was about to bring a new thing in the earth. They could but wait, in awed and contented gladness, to see what it pleased Him to bring ; and ask themselves in humble heartsearching, whether they themselves were able to welcome and receive what He should bring. John did not, any more than the prophet in Daniel, teach his converts that it was theirs to bring in the kingdom of God. They had not made the new life into which in His sovereign will God brought them, and they could not bring about the new thing which was about to break upon the world. They could only see to it that they themselves should not be found a part of the world which, on the breaking of the new day, should vanish like a wreath of mist before the morning sun.



## CHAPTER XI

### God in Creation and Redemption

(CHAPTERS IV and V)

THERE is one prominent feature in the book of Revelation, which must continually be kept in mind, and to which it is therefore wise to direct attention before attempting to understand the content of the book. Many of the events related in it are described with the appearance of following one another in close succession, but they were not intended to be successive in the order of time. The succession may be in order of thought, and the connection be logical, instead of temporal. John describes them in the order in which he thought them.

Thus everyone will probably recognise that Chapters IV and V are not the description of two consecutive and wholly unrelated experiences on the part of the prophet. They really express two of his commanding thoughts about God. He has set them down in the form of two great visions, but in reality they embody the two leading convictions about God's relation to the world and God's purpose with it, which had been the strength of his Jewish faith. They are not wholly new in themselves, but they have received new content and meaning since he became a Christian. And when he describes what he saw in heaven, he is defining the new content which came into his old thought about God through the revelation of Jesus as

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Messiah. Here it is easy to recognise that, though the visions are described in terms of time, they really have nothing to do with time.

It is, however, more difficult to recognise the principle in connection with several of the later visions: yet its presence and its influence must always be kept in mind, if the reader is to guard against forcing the successive series of calamities predicted into a framework of history which is wholly alien to them. Thus John shows a decided fondness for describing the same event twice over; yet he need not be taken to mean that the event is to happen twice over. He may be using the common Hebrew device of iteration, merely as a means of emphasis. The duplication of the event does not imply its repetition, but merely guarantees its certainty. The method seems to have had another attraction for John. It enabled him to include older material, taken from apocalypses which were current at the time, and incorporate this in his book. Thus he was able, not to win authority for what he had to say from the past, but to express his conviction that Jesus fulfilled all the best in that past.

Again, it is a favourite habit of the prophet to relate some great event which took place in heaven and which he was privileged to witness. He then proceeds to describe the same event in a somewhat different form, as it took place on earth. Yet the event has not, in his view, been acted over twice. What he means to emphasise is that God knew it in every detail, before it actually happened at all. What occurs in time has already been fore-ordained in heaven, and a prophet can describe it, as if in its entire detail it had been acted out beforehand. The strange happenings of earth, even when they are most bewildering

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to faith, are no mere accidents of history, but are part of the deliberate counsel of God, which is being slowly, yet surely and greatly, wrought out on the stage of this world.

Reference has just been made to the prophet's fondness for incorporating older material in his book. The habit is common to him and to all the later apocalyptists, and brings great difficulty to their interpreters. All of them carry over traditional expressions and figures, of which they make remarkably free use, but which they seem unwilling absolutely to discard. Incidents, like the assault of Gog and Magog on the messianic kingdom or like the great assize in the valley of the divine judgment, were handed on as among the circumstances which were to herald or to attend the appearance of the consummation. The successive prophets disposed these in differing order or slightly modified them in order to adapt them to their own purposes, but they loved to include these familiar features in their own picture of the future. The result is that occasionally a prophet took over some figure or incident which had been framed to express a certain conception of the future that was not wholly congruent with his own. Conscious of its incompatibility with what he desired to say, yet unwilling to jettison it altogether, he set the old thing alongside the new, as if the two followed one another. In reality the two were different methods of representing the same truth and not at all consecutive events. Thus the assault of the northern armies under Gog and Magog expressed the security of the final kingdom which had God as its stay and the futile opposition of every order which rested on a different support. The true kingdom was essentially opposite in character to all others ; and the great day would manifest its abiding nature by the confusion of the others.



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The assize where God sat to judge the nations meant the same thing from a slightly different point of view. When God from His judgment seat expressed the ultimate values and uttered the final verdicts, He should determine the lot of the nations according to the attitude each took to the eternal truth.

But men loved and valued both representations, finding in each certain elements which appealed to their thoughts, finding in both old traditional hopes. A prophet, who desired to include both, sometimes represented them as succeeding each other in time. A greater artistic genius would probably have fused together the different pictures with their several points of view, and produced a new representation which included all the elements which the old conveyed. The misfortune attaching to the method of the prophets is that it has misled many into the opinion that they were describing history, where they were merely combining great convictions.

John, then, begins his revelation of the future by relating how it comes about that he can have anything to reveal at all, and by declaring who He was from whom the knowledge came. What he has to say is the outcome of his having been privileged to enter the divine counsel and learn the divine purposes before these came to execution. It was not a difficult task, for what saturates the book is the conviction that heaven and earth are not sharply separated localities, but different spheres in which God's activity manifests itself. In the one the divine activity is clear and calm ; in the other it is still in conflict with the alien forces of the world. But it is the same mind which controls and guides both spheres, and it reveals itself to stay up the hearts of men who are still tossed to and fro



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in the hot warfare of the present life, and who are easily bewildered. God makes known His mind, so that men may know the end for which they war. "I saw and behold, a door opened in heaven": it needed no more.

What he saw first was God. The imagery, used in his description, is borrowed from the Old Testament, from the scene in Exodus 24, and particularly from some of the visions of Ezekiel. Behind these last, again, lies material borrowed from the Babylonia in which the prophet lived.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the seven torches burning before the throne probably signify the seven planets, the twenty-four elders stand for other astral deities which once played a great rôle in the Babylonian cosmogony, and the four six-winged creatures represent the four quarters of the world. One needs to trace these back to the earlier and dimmer mythologies in order to recognise what they mean in the thought of him who borrowed them. None of them all represents the Church, though the twenty-four elders naturally suggest such a reference, and though the four living creatures have come to be the accepted symbols, in art and architecture, for the four evangelists. But in the whole of this chapter, John is not speaking about God's work in redemption, nor has he come as yet to think about the earth of the redemption. He speaks about these things in the following chapter and he makes the contrast very sharp and clear. What he dwells on first is the thought of God, the author and creator, the ruler and guide of all things. In His heaven, where His activity is clear and calm, all things joyously

<sup>1</sup> In connection with all the imagery of John, the English student is advised to consult Dr. Moffatt's commentary in the Expositor's Greek Testament. It is specially rich in references on the subject, but anyone who consults the book would be wise to use no reference without first verifying it.

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serve His will and He alone receives glory from His world. The prophet heaps up imagery to express the one thought. God's activity is everywhere—that is expressed by the blazing torches, seven in number, the number which expressed wholeness to the Jewish mind. Nothing can escape God's searching light—that is expressed by the light which glows continually in the torches, for God's activity is guided evermore by perfect wisdom. What fills John's mind is God's work, so constant, so unresting, so wise, so all-pervading, God's unresting and restful activity—the flashing torches over the sleeping sea. And the issue of the divine work is that all created things above and beneath, the twenty-four elders of the heaven, the four beasts of the earth, acknowledge their dependence on the sovereign will of Him who created, and who alone maintains them. As a Psalmist expressed it, within His temple every thing saith Holy.

Experience, it is true, seems to contradict the prophet, and, in particular, the honour of this world appears to be given to the Empire, which is the mere expression of the perverse will of man. But ideally the world belongs to God. Even the huge living creatures, the brute strength and perverse intelligence and ferocity and alertness of this vast world, "where ignorant armies clash by night," are of God. They go only at His bidding, and they return at His command to cast themselves down before His throne. High above them, controlling their apparent excesses, is the will of God, who is behind them all. So the prophet can close his description of his first vision by saying: "It was because Thou didst will it, that they came into existence and were created." Because this is the mind of heaven, the issue of all things shall be the manifestation

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of what is eternally and ideally sure ; it shall be the open manifestation of that will of God without which nothing could exist at all. And God makes His Church confident and sure of these things, for He opens the window into heaven, in order that a prophet may see and make it known.

The final purpose of God, without which there would not have been a world at all, is about to manifest itself, and, the world having become what it is, can only manifest itself through terrific woes. There is much which needs to be changed, and much which, because it cannot be changed, must be swept away. Lest, however, any of the faithful should be ignorant of what is pending and, through ignorance, should be taken by surprise and prove unable to endure, when God comes to set right His world, God makes known His whole mind. The book of the future is about to be opened, but it cannot be opened by anyone except Him in whom the future culminates. No one can read the future, except Messiah in whose person and in whose rule the world shall find itself brought back to its right relation to God. No one can understand the final purpose of God, except the Redeemer, for the final purpose of God is redemption. Hence the entire interest in the fifth chapter, as contrasted with its predecessor, is centred in Christ the Redeemer. Only He can reveal God's end for His world as a redemptive end, because He Himself has made redemption possible. Before such a task the other figures, angelic or earthly, fall back helpless. Hence, too, each chapter closes with a hymn of adoration. In the first, creation praises its God ; in the second, the world praises its Redeemer. The end for which God brought the world into life and being, that it might give glory to its Maker and to Him alone, is brought about by Him who



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has made the end, which seemed to be frustrated, real. And, when His work is finished, all the world shall adore its Maker and its Redeemer.

An earlier prophet said : " The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep and hath closed your eyes, the prophets, and your hands, the seers, hath He covered. And all vision has become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot, for it is sealed, and the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned." " I saw," wrote the last prophet, " in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the back, close sealed with seven seals." To appreciate what is meant, it is necessary to think of a time when books were scarce and expensive, and when they were therefore only written because a man had something to say. A book was no light amusement of a passing hour, but contained a man's thought. Accordingly each of the prophets could use the figure of a book to express the divine thought about the world, God's mind in bringing it into existence and in suffering it to continue. And when both men said that the book was sealed, they meant simply that mankind, in the ordinary course of this life, could not read God's end for them, and were baffled in their efforts to find out His mind. Life had a meaning and a rational end : it was not " a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." The roll of the world's destiny and of man's strange history was in the hands of God, but it needed an interpreter. John, the Christian Jew, said that Jesus had read its meaning and was about to make its issue clear.



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For, when the prophet wept much, because the riddle of the universe seemed insoluble, he saw the book delivered over to the Lamb, which had seven horns and seven eyes, or, as we should say, had complete divine power and perfect wisdom. And what endowed him with power to open the book was the fact of his having been slain. The riddle of this world could not be read in its broken beginning, but in its end, in the light of the purpose of God to redeem it. Now Jesus had redeemed it, and the end was at hand.

There is a certain satisfaction to the troubled mind in being able to believe that the universe is not at the mercy of chance, that the strange, brilliant, terrible happenings of this mortal life are no mere accidents of blind nature, because there is a method in them all and an end set for them all in the unerring wisdom of God. There is a book, and it is legible and it is in the hands of God ; " the decrees of God are His eternal purpose according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory He hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass." Men have rested their minds on that. But there has come a deeper peace to heart and conscience, when they have been able to believe that the eternal purpose is guided by an intelligence which has room for human effort, and by a grace which takes account of human failure. Jesus, to John, had the right to open the book of God's counsel, because He had made its end real. The long history of the earth and of man was not merely controlled by an unearthly wisdom, but was guided to the ends of mercy. The earth was to be the earth of the redemption, and Jesus had made it that.

Hence, in the midst of the throne, sharing its glory and increasing it, the Lamb who died to redeem the world stood triumphant, and even in His triumph He carried the

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marks of His passion. And when honour was being given to Him for all He had fulfilled and had made possible, before Him were offered the prayers of the saints. For these prayers would have had no place at all in the scheme of things, were it not true that the purpose of God is redemptive. They would be a wild and idle beating of the air, were it not that the end of the Lord is governed by tender mercy. But, because God's purpose is redemptive, the prayers of the saints come up before Him, for they are in agreement with His eternal will for the world. They have even a better right to be there and to be presented before the Lord, for through them the work He began is being continued. Through them the saints fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. The Church itself, be it noted, is not yet present in this representation of the court of heaven, and the saints are not regarded as having reached it. They are yet in the earth, which is struggling and stumbling on to its unknown goal. But to them the goal is known, and in Jesus they have their free access to the presence of God. They are able to bring their prayers in confidence before the Almighty for His remembrance, for in the heart of heaven is He who made them sure that the end of God for His world was to save men.

The Church is not there. It is the angelic ministers who bring the praise of the Church to the Lamb: "Worthy art Thou to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for Thou wast slain and didst purchase unto God with Thy blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation; and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests, and they reign upon the earth." It is only possible to measure the significance of the utterance, when it is recognised that the Church is not present. It is down

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in the squalid cares and persecutions of the earth, the "scattered, huddled flock whose crime was Christ," the little company of converted women and men. The prophet knew them, for he had written his letters to them; knew what manner of men they were, for he had just told them how well he knew about the first love grown cold, and the place where Satan held his seat, and the undue deference to the sect of the Nicolaitans, hated of Christ. He knew too what was their condition, for he was sharing with them the tribulation and the patience. Yet he writes this as the verdict of heaven on their case: "Thou hast made them to Thy God a kingdom and a priesthood, and they are reigning on the earth."

The Church holds these things from Christ, because He is the meek victim; no stronger figure could be found to express this than the slaughtered Lamb. In a later chapter the same figure is put against the world's ideal of power, when the Lamb is contrasted with the beast of brute force. There the true source of victory and kingship is opposed to the false, and especially is opposed to what men in that particular time were most tempted to follow. It was not by following these methods, but by meekness and the voluntary submission to all which power could do to Him, that He had overcome. And He so overcame, not for His own sake, but in order that He might win a people to God. He has won them and made them a kingdom and a priesthood. They are priests, because their prayers rise like incense before the throne of God, and not only find a place there but continue the work of redemption. They are a kingdom because, though persecuted, they have the real source of permanent victory and are already able to triumph openly over all the seductions of the world. Even



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as Christ overcame, so do they, with the same weapons and for the same end. The sealed roll of God's purpose, the meaning of this harsh world, is opened by Him who is Himself the end of God with His world, and is recognised by everyone who takes his place in the task of redemption.

Christ has the right and the power to make tolerable and clear the riddle of this painful life, not because He has talked about it, but because He has gone down into it. The unmerited suffering, the defeat, the heart-breaking disappointment, He went down into all that. The Lamb is the victor, because He was the Lamb, suffering, tortured, slain. It is this actual achievement of Christ victorious Himself through pain, and able to impart His victory, because He did not win it for Himself, which gives Him the right to interpret the final mind of Almighty God toward men. Hence, because Christ died to redeem men, He is also the end of the whole creation. The world is to go back through Him into the condition which God purposed in making it, and from which it has departed. Therefore angels and elders and living creatures, the powers of heaven and earth, unite in the closing hymn of praise to Him through whom they learn that redemption is the goal toward which the world is surely moving. The new song which was offered to Christ the Redeemer and the hymn which was sung in praise of God the Creator blend into one closing thanksgiving. Creation is for redemption, and a created world which needs redemption and has found it unites to give honour to God, who in Christ has made the consummation real.

Nowhere is it more possible than in this noble chapter to recognise one characteristic of the prophet's thought. He continually uses old phrases and is saturated in old



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imagery. He heaps up from all quarters symbols which have attached themselves to his subject. Some of these it is possible to trace back to Jewish sources; others can, with more or less certainty, be recognised as of older and alien origin. He has accepted more than symbols and imagery, for he makes use of a frame-work of thought which in its essential features has been borrowed. But always the central figure to whom his reverence is given shines out against the alien surroundings and throws them into the background. Jesus Christ is the centre of John's reverent and adoring gratitude, and the One, whose coming he gratefully remembers, whose return he joyously expects as the hope of the world, is not the Jewish Messiah, nor any other world-saviour; it is Jesus who died on Calvary. Nowhere more than here is it possible to feel the artificial character of the symbols which have been gathered round Jesus. What the prophet has delighted to collect round Him by way of imagery, he has borrowed: what he has seen and loved is wholly his own.

## CHAPTER XII

### The Cosmic Significance of Christ

IT is a remarkable and, to many minds, a puzzling thing to recognise that, within a few years after Jesus lived the simple life He did in Palestine, His figure received the startling reconstruction which John has given to it. For it is no less than a reconstruction which is offered in the Apocalypse. To pass from the stories of the Synoptic Gospels into the allegories and symbols of the book of Revelation is to pass into a new atmosphere and almost into a new world. Jesus at once takes on superhuman proportions. Instead of the baby born in a stable and cradled in a manger, because Bethlehem could give his mother no room in its inn, comes the child born of a mother who had the sun for her suitable background, the moon under her feet and a nimbus of the seven planets round her head. For the man who worked as a village-carpenter, who preached with a fisherman's coble for his pulpit, who took a towel and girded himself to wash the feet of his disciples, appears One, who held in His right hand the seven stars and out of whose mouth went a two-edged sword. In place of the man who said on the cross, "I thirst," who remembered his mother's weakness and his disciple's heartache by committing her to St. John's care, there is offered the Christ, who is the beginning of the creation of

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God or the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.

Everything, it is true, grows to appear on a grander scale, but everything seems also to move away into a more remote distance from human life and to have few points of contact with Him who dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, whose grace and truth appeared more clearly and more winningly because He dwelt among us. Recognising all this, many, especially in modern times, may be inclined to say that the chief thing the Apocalypse can prove is the speed with which the Church was able to forget its real Lord, and, under the influence of methods of thought alien to its true spirit, to move away from the simplicity of its earlier attitude into speculative regions where everything grew at once more grandiose and more dim. And many other simple-hearted readers may find themselves using certain parts of the book of Revelation from a sense of duty, because after all it forms part of their Bible, but leaving them with a certain sense of relief, because they do not exactly find there the Lord who has won and who still keeps the allegiance of their hearts.

Is there anything more in the attitude of the book than the effort to fit Christ into an inherited scheme of thought, which was not really fitted to hold Him? Must the modern task be to bring back Christ from the apocalyptic wrappings in which an earlier generation has only succeeded in hiding Him? So it may be asked. It is, however, rarely an adequate explanation of any large movement of thought or even change of attitude in any community to set it down as a mere perversity or aberration. Especially is this the case, when such a community is facing with a thrill of wonder and awe the new privileges

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and new responsibilities which it has discovered. To dismiss the matter in this casual and summary manner is merely to surrender the effort to explain what may have been the impulses which led the men of the past precisely into this direction. When, on the other hand, a later generation is patient enough and humble enough to recognise that their predecessors could think, and to ask after the motives which guided their thought in a certain direction, the reward follows, not merely in discovering the direct object of search, but in discovering that the reason why later men cannot and do not need to retain certain features of an earlier phase of thought is that it has done its work and made its contribution. It has warded off some danger which was threatening the power and life of the Church. It has given later men the point of view which their predecessors in their own way were seeking. It becomes safe to discard their method of approach, because what they were approaching is recognised and retained.

Hence it becomes of value to ask whether there was anything in the conditions of life and thought of the infant communities in Asia Minor, that demanded the special view of Christ which their prophet sought to bring before them and himself. To discover this is to make sure that we even know what he desired to say. Clearly, then, the new Christian communities were widely scattered over the province and were strongest in the larger towns. This may have been due to the first converts having been largely made from among the Jews, who in Asia Minor were immigrants and town-dwellers. But the women and men who worshipped together were all converts from other forms of religious belief, with very different types of thought behind them. Probably, too, most of them were drawn



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from the lower ranks of society and were simple and uncultured people. Then as now, the educated knew so well what could be said on both sides of every question that they hesitated to adopt a brand-new faith. Then as now, the people who had a position in their little world were held back by a thousand ties from identifying themselves with what would change their associates, and rupture all their social relations. It is not unjust to suppose that the little Churches may have been largely recruited from the restless minds which in all generations drift towards a new religion, merely because it is new. The early persecutions, indeed, may have had one salutary effect in purging the young faith of these unstable elements, though they may have had the other result of heating brains which were already sufficiently warm. One cannot resist the suspicion that John had an excellent reason for speaking so much of the patience of the saints and for reiterating his Master's benediction on those who endured. His own patience may have been sorely tried by the instability of these restless and impatient elements in the Christian society.

The infant communities had no traditions: they were creating ours. They had no definitely recognised Christian literature; our canon was being written for their use, and they, by selecting what served best their religious life, were forming it into a canon. They had no regulated worship, and the acts they performed and ritual they practised had not yet received a clear explanation. What they meant by their Christian worship depended on the thoughts they brought to it. "In the morning when the sun rises they intone a hymn to Christ as God:" wrote Pliny in his official report to the Emperor, after he had inquired into the habits of the Christian community in his

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province. What a multitude of suggestions lies behind the simple statement, as soon as one inquires into the source or meaning of the custom described. Why at the sun-rising? Was Christ supposed to have any association with the sun or the dawn? Where did the hymn come from, and what were its terms? The truth is that nothing was formulated in the infant community. Such officials as they possessed were entirely untrained, thinking the same confused, tentative thoughts on the great subjects which had come to occupy their minds. Their teachers were the men who proved themselves most capable of uttering the common convictions and of impressing other minds. A situation of this type serves to stimulate and develop intelligence which a better regulated system often succeeds in sterilising. But the cost is not small, for the absence of any system generally throws all influence into the power of the glib, loud-voiced person who has no hesitations and little reverence for himself or for the opinions of other men. Almost everything in the young communities was still formless, inchoate. They had in charge nothing less than the new thoughts which were to work like leaven in the world, transforming all its values and bringing in new standards. Yet the Churches which held this great commission were like islands in a sea of heathenism, separated from one another and thus prevented from building up a Christian opinion and setting up a clear standard.

These early believers must have been sharply conscious that they stood for a religion which was different from the surrounding faiths and, in particular, very different from the faiths which they themselves had left when they elected to cast in their lot with Christianity. Each man knew, with more or less clearness, why he had forsaken

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his former faith, and why the Christian evangel had so appealed to him as to carry him from his old moorings into a new and fresher tide. They saw too other men come, drawn by this thing or that in the new faith, its clearer teaching on immortality, its sweeter or sterner thought about God, its power to restore hope to a man whose conscience had rendered him lonely and impotent. Here and there and there again the Gospel reached out and seized a man or a woman who was swept into one of the forming communities. One was bankrupt in spirit, till she learned of Christ who is the resurrection and the life, and came to believe that there was something real beyond the blank wall of death. Another was destitute of hope, till he discovered that there was one who never despaired of sinners. But while the faith thus drew one here and another there, and while it associated them together in bonds which grew stronger and finer with every year of Christian fellowship, the faith itself which thus drew them together remained to them all a thing of yesterday. They were all one, because they called Jesus Lord. The faith had its own note, its one centre of supreme attraction, it had, what made no small part of its power, its sharp capacity for repulsion ; but it was no more than one among the other faiths. It had come, for many of them remembered when it had not been : it had its date of beginning, which was not at all remote. Their pagan friends shrugged their shoulders and said that it would pass with the same suddenness with which it had appeared. It was another among the mushroom religions which sprang up in the rank soil of a decadent age, and nowhere sprang more rankly than in Asia Minor. Let men wait a little while, and they should see it die as they had seen it come to life.



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But there were men in the Christian community who said that their religion was not one among the faiths of the world—it was religion, nothing more and nothing less. It was not of yesterday, for it was the fulfilment and realisation of what had always been. Christ was not of yesterday, He was before time. Through Him was made known to the world what God had purposed about man and what was His relation to man from the beginning of time. One of the men who saw this with the greatest clearness was John, the prophet, and he saw it with the greater clearness, because he belonged to the succession of the prophets who had always pondered over God's purpose with man and God's relation to man. And that, Jew though he was, writing though he did in terms taken from his Jewish world, he uttered the convictions of those who formed the backbone of the little Churches in Asia Minor is proved by the fact that they welcomed his book and made it part of their and our Christian heritage.

He said to his fellows: We are not fighting out a novel and lonely struggle, each in his own town, each at his own booth, each in his own slave-gang. The struggle is an old war, which has been since time began; indeed it was before time began, for there was war in heaven and out of it Michael hurled down the dragon. Since then, it has continued with varying fortunes, but never ceasing, wherever men have been and under whatever conditions they have lived. Only the issues are clearer now than ever they have been before, since the Christ has come to show how clean-cut they are by revealing the end God has set. He has come, but He was before He came, for the end was not something which He proclaimed as a new discovery but was that which was in the mind of God from the



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beginning. To-day everything is moving swiftly and surely to its long appointed issue. As the end has been made definite, the lines of demarcation have been more sharply drawn, and the characters on both sides have been more sharply outlined. With the revelation of the Christ has come the revelation of Antichrist, and men are moving instinctively to one side or the other of the opposing ranks.

To the prophet Jesus was the protagonist in that age-long warfare who made sure its issue and became the leader of all who have part in it on the side of light and order. Because He is the end to which it was all moving, and sums up its issue, He was not absent from all the past which prepared His advent. Hence He can be endowed with the characteristics of those who have previously been expected as similar leaders. John accordingly found himself able to apply to Jesus characteristics drawn from the expected Messiah of Judaism and to incorporate in his prophecy fragments of Hebrew apocalypse which foretold a similar figure. That was natural enough, but he did not feel it incongruous to borrow from the older faiths and to carry over elements from these into his picture. Several of his loans contain features which were once more intimately associated with the forces of nature, and we are conscious of the old struggle between light and darkness, between spring and winter, rather than of the moral struggle between good and evil. But the prophet felt no difficulty in using them for his novel purpose, because, under the influence of his Christian point of view, he saw, wherever he looked, only one thing. He could only see again the one supreme struggle which, whether it was in the human soul, or in society, or between the nations or in physical nature, made at once the glory and

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the opportunity of the life of man. So sharply had Jesus drawn the line of division for him that he became at times unable to see anything else. The issues were at once so clear and so tremendous that they seemed to be written large over all human thought and the world's history.

It is not difficult to recognise the danger which attended such a method of thought about Christ, in reference alike to His nature and to His work of redemption. To use analogies and figures borrowed from nature processes in order to describe spiritual forces or to enforce moral issues has more often brought with it the degradation of the moral than the elevation of the physical. Few things have been more liable to taint the higher conceptions than the attitude of mind which can represent them as really analogous to physical things. Locusts and scorpions, the power of which resides in their tails, are hopelessly inadequate emblems under which to represent the character or the method of moral hurt to the souls of men. Madonna with the moon under her feet and the sunrays round her blue robe, when it appears in a cathedral window, is a conundrum in archæology rather than a help to devotion. But we do injustice to John if we think of him, as though he went out of his way to capture these things for Christian uses, or even elected to employ them, because they were already in the minds of the converts from heathen faiths. He could and did use these analogies, because they appealed to his own mind, not because through them he could better appeal to other minds. They were also specially congenial to his Jewish mind, because all the prophets had believed in and had taught something more than the redemption of humanity. They looked for a redeemed world, in which nature was included as well as man. The

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whole world was suffering from a mortal disorder, and the whole world should be restored, when in the day of His self-revelation God should bring back the reign of order. Analogies from the physical world could find their ready entry into a system of thought, which, because "the fulness of the whole earth was God's glory," expected a time when a renewed humanity should rejoice with a renewed world.

Now, John insisted to his fellow-Christians, the end of the long disorder was at hand. The purpose of God, which existed before the world came into being, was manifested in Him whom they worshipped, and all things were to return to their first beginning. He was more than Master and Lord to the little communions which trusted in Him, He was to be acknowledged throughout creation. Only, His recognition could not come easily. The clearness with which He had revealed the end had also served to reveal the opposition which had always been present against it. As the mighty will of God for redemption was defined with a new power, so the might of evil was discovered in all its intensity. Christian men were made more conscious of themselves and of all the issues of that to which they were committed: evil was also more conscious of itself and of its malign ends. It was rendered even more desperate in its resistance, because the time was short. Before the inevitable end which God had decreed could arrive with its ineffable peace, there must be a struggle far exceeding any which the world had previously witnessed. The forces of good and evil must face each other for their last decisive fight. There was no room for indecision any more; men must make up their minds on which side they meant to stand.



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Here was no longer any question of whether a man might languidly prefer this or might tepidly reject that, for the men who in the day of the great issues could still hesitate or sway back and forward were lukewarm water fit for nothing but to make men sick. The world was being compelled to take sides, and the sides were black and white with no intermediate greys. The underlying character of every life was coming out in sharp outline, what commanded the secret allegiance of each soul was manifesting itself openly ; the saints bear the mark of their Master, and the men who worship the beast bear the mark of their lord. Not to choose in that great hour was to let one's choice go by default, but it was virtually to choose. What might seem mere drifting with the tide was none the less an act of drifting into a choice. Jesus Christ was no mere private object of devotion for a little clique here or for an individual soul there ; He was dividing the nations and sifting out the world.

It is not difficult to recognise in part the effect of such teaching. When the prophet's visions came to be read at some meeting of one of the Churches to which they were addressed, it is possible to see how they may have affected the listeners. A man present there had been drawn, he hardly remembered how, under the influence of the Crucified. He had come to respect the members of the Christian society as cleaner and more upright than most of the men with whom he was brought into business relations. He had grown tired of the practices attending the festivals of the *magna mater*, for he had come to recognise that they sanctioned in a goddess conduct which his moral sense would have condemned in his wife or his daughters. In the atmosphere of the



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Christian faith he had found the high austerity of a God whom a man could reverence and worship. He had been refreshed by the puritanic simplicity of its worship in contrast with the hectic appeal to the senses which another faith allowed or encouraged. He had become a member of the Christian society and attended its services, because they soothed and heartened him. But already the first impressions were growing a little dulled. He had discovered that his new associates were very human.

The slow, steady drag of old habits and the constant influence of old friends and neighbours were bringing him back into something like indifference. In the vivid phrases of the prophet's letter life became again a tremendous reality, charged with infinite issues. It was a battle and always had been ; it was war for all that made humanity. Christ became, not one to be languidly accepted or curiously selected among objects of man's worship, but the final challenge to conscience and intelligence. The issues were clearing day by day and hour by hour. While in the past the opposing forces had often been so mixed as to be almost indistinguishable, they were now being sifted out in preparation for the decisive struggle. And where was he ?

Some troubled woman had been drawn to Christianity by the infinitely sweet and courageous message of forgiveness. Here was One who had suffered even a harlot to touch His feet and had not counted her moral collapse a reason for making it certain that she must fall again. He had believed it possible for a soul to repent and to begin afresh. Through Christ she had repented, had laid down the intolerable burden of the past and with a lightened heart had begun anew. But her evil-doing had been her

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own individual concern with which no other had greatly meddled, her repentance had been her personal affair, which she had wrought out alone, and her new life of struggle and joy had been a secret experience between her and her Redeemer. Now, when she listened to the prophet, she saw how no man's wrongdoing was his private affair, no woman's victory was her secret joy or solace, for both were of moment to the world. She was one with all the repentant and with all the triumphant, for the same Lord had been giving pardon and renewal, ever since redemption was needed. Her life was taken up into, and made to share in, the life of a great multitude. And what they shared in was not something which they had come to think out for themselves: it was the purpose of God for them, before they even came into being. Behind her and around her were those who had known the same shame, were engaged in the same struggle and were sure of the same victory. And Christ was coming to reveal the consummation for them all.

All the horizons of the little Churches widened out. Life became a unity with a rational end and a moral purpose to serve, when they thought of it in the light of Christ, their Redeemer. We, to whom life's horizons have widened out and who know the calmer wisdom and sweeter patience and quieter hope which become possible through the fact, often forget how hard an effort it cost to make wide and sure the Christian simplicities. And we rightly and inevitably hesitate to use some of the methods by which a great soul laboured and rejoiced to bring them home to the minds of his fellow-worshippers. The terms he could employ about his Lord do not greatly appeal to us any more. Only it is wise to make sure that we know

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what he wanted to say through the terms he used. He had seen Jesus the Redeemer of the world and the end of God made real in Him, and even the grotesque myths of alien faiths seemed to hint at and to foreshadow Him. Earth and heaven and the thoughts of men had longed for Him and unconsciously hoped in Him. And the prophet poured out his tribute to Jesus Christ, who was not of yesterday but had been the agent from the beginning in bringing to light the purpose of God with a sinful world. Now He had come and the end was near, the end which was to save men and their world into order and light and peace.

## CHAPTER XIII

# The Great Tribulation: Its Purpose and its Issue

(CHAPTERS VI AND VII)

JOHN has declared that the book of the world's destiny is in the hands of God, and that its end has been determined by Him. He has also declared that it could only be opened by One who was Himself the end, because He summed up and introduced God's purpose of redemption. With the final advent of Messiah, the outcome of all creation and history should be the earth of the redemption. But, the world having departed widely from the divine end for it, the consummation could only be realised through terrible acts of judgment. The prophet, therefore, proceeds to describe one aspect of these acts of judgment, the birth-pangs of Messiah.

He had already made clear how inevitable and searching these woes must be, for in the letters to the seven Churches he had driven home the truth that judgment must begin at the house of God in order to purge out its unworthy elements. If the righteous needed such trials and must expect them from Christ's coming, much more must the world. It also was to be restored to seemly order and, before it could be won back from disorder, must be



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chastised and purified. In so far as these chastisements fell upon the ungodly, they did not directly concern the Christian community. But, since the faithful souls were still on earth, they were still deeply involved in its fortunes and its fate and could not escape their share in the calamities which were about to befall the world. Hence the prophet turned now to deal with the coming woes, but mainly in their relation to the faithful who, however innocent, could not wholly escape from them. He assured his fellow-Christians that they need not be dismayed, for all the coming sorrows were strictly determined in their incidence by God. Though not directed against the Church, they formed a true test of its faithfulness, and were therefore to be humbly accepted out of their Lord's hands and patiently borne. And, further, since they came from the God of redemption, they were strictly determined in their scope by the purpose for which they were sent. No loyal Christian should be swept away by them, however much he might suffer. Though the very foundations of the solid earth were convulsed, each faithful spirit was numbered and sealed through the heedful grace of God, was washed in the blood of the Lamb, and, having been preserved through the coming woe, should receive his sure place in the blessed consummation. The purpose, accordingly, of this message of the prophet is not primarily to announce or to describe the impending judgment, it is to assure the elect that, when it comes, they need have no fear since it is the will of their God to deliver them from it. Because of this, the entire scene is carried out in heaven, not on the stage of the existing world. John sees it all beyond time, because he thinks of it as the purpose of God. He is speaking about these coming events, not in order

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to enable men to recognise them when they come, but to make them capable of bearing them through their knowledge of the source from which they come and of the end which they fulfil. Christian men may be of good courage in connection with the testing hour which is at hand, for they know their God's mind toward them through it all. Of one thing the Church may be confident in everything which is about to befall them; no one shall be able to pluck one chosen soul out of the Father's hands.

The prophet began his vision by stating the condition which made the world ripe for judgment. God, he said, had already been dealing with it and through several troubles had warned men of His nearness and of His purpose in their chastisement. The first four seals describe these solemn warnings of the Almighty in a series of woes which bear unmistakable evidence of having been modelled on actual events that had already befallen the Empire. Here John borrowed from Zechariah the earlier prophet's representation of the four horsemen who rode out across the earth. But he borrowed the equipment the horsemen received and the task they were to fulfil from troubles and fears which were only too familiar to every man in Asia Minor. In the struggle between Rome and Parthia, which was taking place not very far from their homes and the issue of which was of fearful significance to them, they knew too well the riders, the Parthian bowman, the Roman with his short stabbing sword, the famine which dogged the heels of both, while death closed the ghastly procession with Hades following to harvest and glean in the fields where these reapers had been busy. John saw them, as Amos saw famine and drought, mildew and pestilence,

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to be sent of God, fearful warnings to the indifferent souls of men. They were meant to appeal to deadened consciences and awake men to the peril into which they had brought themselves.

How little men had learned from the warnings of the Almighty the prophet described in a vivid figure: "I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held and they cried with a great voice saying, How long O Master, the holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" As a matter of fact many of the Christian martyrs died with a very different cry on their lips, and though some showed another spirit, John had no wish to substitute in the minds of his fellow-sufferers something other than the utterance which the Master had consecrated, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." None the less, every deed of cruelty, every martyrdom does cry with a great voice for God to manifest Himself and by judgment bring to an end a condition of things which has made even one such act possible. Every outrage or wrong witnesses to the disorder of God's world and cries with an insistent voice for God to vindicate, not the cause of the wronged, but His own cause. Besides, the martyrdoms beyond everything else proved the world to be ripe for judgment. When matters had reached so desperate a pass that the one thing men could do with the souls which bore witness to a higher and a better order was to martyr them, the world's bitter need of God was made plain. Its use of His merciful warnings had merely been to try to stifle the only voices which lifted up their testimony for a holier way. In precisely the same way Daniel saw in the world's



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deliberate and open attack on the true religion a proof that the end could not be delayed. Both prophets taught that, when the world had shown its rooted aversion to all good by persecution of those who witnessed for the blessed will of God, there remained nothing but the great day of the divine wrath. There were to be no more warnings, and the judgment takes at once a larger sweep. The warnings were sent to mankind, but the coming doom was not to be limited to them. For the sixth seal brought in nothing less than the consummation, which was preceded and introduced by a catastrophe that involved, not merely the social order or the world of men, but the very foundations of the habitable earth.

John did not enter into details, because, as I have said, his interest was not at present directed to the description of the calamity in itself. It was enough for his immediate purpose to describe the heaven rolled up like a scroll, the dry land shaken, the world of humanity helpless and dismayed. He hurried on to bid the faithful in that supreme hour have no fear because, even when the familiar world crashed down round them, they had as their security the assurance that God knew each soul which trusted in Him and should keep all such safe in His perfect protection. To express his conviction of the calm peace with which Christian men might meet the great day the prophet borrowed a picture from a Jewish apocalypse. It served to embody the general lines of the thing he wished to say since it described how in the consummation the sealed and numbered elect or the true Israel were to be preserved through all the great tribulation. But, since its Jewish origin made it ill-fitted to convey all the content of his message, he adapted it by adding a new Christian



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conclusion. In it he wrote about the blood of Christ as that through which the elect found their security, and he set the new kingdom into which their Lord redeemed them, not on the earth, but beyond the shock of time.

When the whole passage is thus interpreted, Chapter VII. is recognised as no interlude or mere subsidiary feature, but as the factor which determines the purpose and character of this section of the prophecy. John does not present us here with a picture of the redeemed in heaven, because he wishes to interpose some relief in the catalogue of woe. After all, his description of these has not been so long drawn out as to demand a change of theme. In later chapters he passes on from sorrow to sorrow with far greater iteration. He describes the bliss of the redeemed, because it serves his purpose. He wishes to assure the faithful that the great tribulation cannot touch them and cannot rob one of them of a salvation which Christ has made sure for His own.

Hence, as the opening verses of Chapter VIII. make clear, the whole vision takes place in heaven, because the matters with which it deals are not thought of in terms of time. John is bidding the Church think, as he himself has been thinking, of the great tribulation and the consummation before they emerge on the stage of the world at all. They come from God and express the will of God concerning His people. He has determined them beforehand and in particular He has determined their influence on and the limit of their power over Christian men. What that will is God has made known in Jesus Christ to the prophet who is able therefore to comfort his brethren. However terrible the sorrows which precede the end

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may be, they need dismay no soul who is in Christ, for he shall issue from them into a heaven Christ has made sure.

Most students of the book, it is right to state, do not take the view which has been presented here. Instead of making Chapter VII. the starting point of their interpretation, they call it "an *entr'acte* in form of a consoling rhapsody relieving the tension by lifting the eyes of Christians to the sunlit bliss beyond these voices."<sup>1</sup> What chiefly seems to determine them is the recognition that the sealing of the 144,000 in Chapter VII. is undoubtedly represented as taking place on the earth. Hence they feel compelled to conclude that the woes of Chapter VI. also take place on the earth and are therefore a prophecy of the future. That is to say, the seals of Chapter VI. describe woes which are to befall the world, and which are parallel to the fresh woes which begin in Chapter VIII. Naturally, if this be true, Chapter VII. is an interlude.

Now I am probably biassed through coming to the whole question from the point of view of an Old Testament student. But the way in which John deals with the fragment of apocalypse he took from a Jewish source is curiously parallel to the method followed by Daniel in an apocalypse he took from a Babylonian source (Chapter VII.). In each case the prophet saw something, particularly in the conclusion of the apocalypse,

<sup>1</sup> The view indicated is represented and ably put forward by Dr. Charles and Dr. Moffatt. It gives an alternative explanation which may meet the difficulty of all who feel that, unless the chapter is thus read as an interlude, it seems to wind up the entire drama, to introduce the final end before its time and consequently to appear awkwardly before a fresh cycle of woes opens in the eighth chapter.

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which he thought he could use and adapt for his purpose. In each case there was material in the beginning which did not at all suit the new surroundings, and which has been entirely ignored. Thus in Daniel all the special features descriptive of the earlier kingdoms, the emergence of the beasts from the abyss, the breaking out of the four winds, fell outside the later prophet's scheme. He retained them, but offered no explanation of them ; on the other hand, what he could use he not only retained but explained and expanded. In precisely the same way John found the sealing and the numbering of the elect in his Hebrew apocalypse, and he not only kept but expanded what fitted in admirably with what he wanted to say. But the four angels holding the four winds, the fifth angel who controlled the others, the remarkable absence of Messiah were all features in the beginning of the vision of which he could make no use. He retained these, but ignored them. Everyone has noticed how these angels never appear again and never unloose the winds which they were holding. Everyone has noted the absence of Messiah in a vision which makes Messiah the centre of the new order, since through Him the elect find their security. But, when we recognise that these features were purely Jewish, retained but ignored by the Christian interpreter, we recognise also how the special feature which gives rise to the greatest difficulty, *viz.*, that the sealing and numbering take place on the earth, while everything on both sides of it takes place in heaven, is another purely Jewish element which has been ignored by John. The Jewish writer could and must describe the catastrophe and the sealing alike as happening on the earth, because he, true to the



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tradition of Israel, was expecting the final kingdom to be set up on earth. John in his own adaptation of the fragment carried the whole to the other side of time and described the redeemed before the throne and before the Lamb where he set the blessed future and the kingdom. In fact, the prophet took a section from a Jewish apocalypse which gave a worthy answer to the question, who shall be able to survive the final woes, and he applied it to the elect of the Christian Church. These were the true "remnant," sealed by God, the true Israel, heirs of all the past and inheritors of all the future. And he simply ignored the fact that the beginning of the fragment did not fit in with his Christian view, precisely as Daniel ignored certain elements in what he borrowed.

John, then, was writing to Christian men who were about to face the great tribulation. Part of it came from their being involved in a perishing world, part came from their being possessed of a light which shamed and fretted the surrounding dark. And he bade them believe, not merely in their ability to endure to the end, but in their power to emerge triumphant, with undimmed faith and unstained conscience. The passion of Christ gave the power to do both.

Few questions interest men more passionately and deeply than that of their own and their world's suffering and trials, and few are likely to be more enduring. The questions of the world are as mutable as the world which puts them, the problems which exercise and divide one generation come to seem trivial to its successor. But all the generations are made acquainted with grief; and need to learn, as best they can, to bear it.



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Not only is the matter universal and constantly recurrent, it has seemed to many utterly useless and inexplicable in a world about which they believe that it has come from and is controlled by God. Trial and suffering are apt to appear strangely distributed, often given to those who deserve them least, and denied to others who need or merit them most. And the saints have always been those who suffered most and were most tried. To enter into close relation and devotion to a great cause and therefore to one's fellow-men, to care how it fares with the world, to grow in faithfulness to duty, to become sensitive to pity is to have increased the possibility and the certainty of pain.

It is little wonder that men have always pondered over the question, and those not least, who have said least about their thoughts, but have greatly sorrowed and have pondered sorrow in their own hearts.

Both Daniel and John were forced to deal with this eternal subject of men, this heavy problem to all good men. The Old Testament prophet saw his people scattered across the world, and everywhere, in the exact proportion in which they remained loyal to their God, exposed to suspicion and always liable to persecution. He also had it in charge to say that the suffering would not lessen but grow more intense, before help came. The nearer men drew to the great hour of release, the more bitter should the opposition grow. But, beyond the assurance of the time being short, Daniel had not much more to say by which he might stay up the hearts of the faithful. He knew that suffering and the trial to faith were certain to all the saints in exact proportion to their sainthood, and he proudly refused to mitigate the demand.

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He believed that their faithfulness should receive its requital from God, and he promised it. For he was clearly conscious how unnerving to all men is the prospect of ultimate futility attending their steadfastness. They may in certain high moments of the spirit reach the condition of caring nothing about the final issue of their work, because the immediate task is sure. But he also knew that men only attempt the best, and especially only continue to attempt the best, when they can believe that their work will not go for nothing but will find its place as a real thing in a real world. When men believed that God cared enough for their service not to let it become futile, he knew that they could at least bear the inevitable suffering which attended their effort. Though they could only regard the suffering as a strange circumstance which in God's inscrutable will attended man's life, they could then stand stiffly at their post, till it pleased God to dismiss His guard.

We pass into a different atmosphere in the book of Revelation. Suffering is in the book from beginning to end, and it is the suffering of the saints, who are suffering because they are saints. The attack upon them is no casual affair, for the order of their world is deliberately leagued against them. Not only is their environment hostile in the Roman Empire which, the writer sees, is about to redouble its persecution and make their condition outwardly desperate ; for he seems to have expected some measure on the part of government which should make it impossible for men to buy food without an implicit or explicit approval of the Emperor-worship. But there were also the mysterious demonic powers, in whose existence the prophet evidently believed. These powers of

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the air with their prince had been always inveterate in their hostility to the infant Church, and were now rousing themselves to fiercer opposition, because they knew that their time was short. Before the day appointed for their final collapse arrived, they were given their last opportunity. More clearly and more fiercely than ever the opposition between the principles which strove for mastery in the world was to reveal itself ; and in these stupendous and final struggles the suffering of the saints must be intensified.

The prophet was as firmly convinced as his Old Testament predecessor that the appointed period of suffering was short. The hour of redemption was at hand and Christ was at the door. He could urge his brethren to recognise that their fiery trial, though intense, should be brief. He could also exhort them to be faithful, because their work could not prove futile. But he could add more to stay up their fainting hearts, for he believed and could assure them that their suffering had a value all its own. Since the world was a place for training the souls of men and since its end was redemption, the discipline through which they were passing was one of the things for which the world came into being. Suffering was valuable in itself and was not merely a strange inexplicable phase which must be passed through on their journey, but which they put out of mind, whenever the journey's end was reached. He could linger over it, because he believed, as it were, that God lingered tenderly over it. The martyrs had a special place in His heart and in His kingdom. Their souls were under the altar, set before Him in a peculiar place to which no other had any right. They were sealed and numbered by Him,



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as though each had his own place in God's regard. When their prayers were offered there fell a silence over heaven for the space of half-an-hour, for even the unceasing praise of heaven must cease until the voice of the martyrs was heard. So constantly and directly did their needs reach up to the ear of God, for on the right hand of the throne stood a Lamb, as it had been slain.

Thus, throughout the book the element of suffering is not something barely negative, from which John averts his eyes, slurring over it, hurrying away from it, counting it an unavoidable element in the great world-tragedy over which God presides to bring it to a sure and blessed end. Far from averting his eyes, he lingers over it, reiterating the wonder and the dignity of its presence. Suffering was a sacred thing to him, because it brought something which could not be obtained otherwise, and which was in itself of surpassing worth. What it could give and did give, what could be gained in no other way was a greater likeness to Christ and a share in His peculiar work of redemption. For He was the first martyr, and from the world He had carried away into the glory of heaven the ineffaceable symbols of His passion. "I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain." "Worthy art Thou to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain and didst purchase unto God with Thy blood men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." The emblems of the passion were not slurred by Christ, nor were they matters to be forgotten and left behind on earth. These alone He brought with Him from the earth, when He had left it; but He brought all these. The martyrs shared this



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with their Lord, and were nearer Him through it, and took their part in His work of redemption by it : " the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd." Whatever brings Christian men nearer Christ the prophet loves to linger over.

This feature in John's thought only becomes more noteworthy, when it is remarked how he has no hesitation in setting Christ's passion apart. It was something unique, done for men. " These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The thanksgiving of heaven is a thanksgiving for a redemption which men receive. But this fact only sets into more emphatic prominence how constantly he dwells on the share Christian men have in the suffering of their Redeemer. The way of access to heaven is the way of suffering, because it is the way of likeness to Christ.

Yet it cannot be said that the prophet takes the attitude of the ascetic, to whom self-denial seems a beautiful thing in itself with which God must be well-pleased, merely because it is self-denial or a rejection of the natural instincts. Here and there, it is true, he appears to value virginity for its own sake. But it is always difficult to determine how far this condition was commended on its own account, and how far its high valuation was connected with the conviction of the near approach of the end. Men who marry inevitably think of the future ; indeed it is one of the blessed moral influences of marriage that it prevents men, when they grow old, from living in the past. His children keep many a man's face to the future. But every man, who expects the world to come to "an end within his own

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lifetime, will instinctively shun marriage with its forward-looking hopes. And every man, who strips himself for battle before the instant end, will refuse to be entangled with the joy and care of wife and children.

It is accordingly dangerous to be dogmatic over what may have influenced John in the high value he set on virginity ; and all who remember that he had been a Jew will especially shun dogmatism on the question. But this at least is clear, that the sufferings and self-denials of his book are never self-inflicted nor even chosen by those who bear them. They are constantly the sufferings and self-denials which the constitution and order of the present world bring on men who refuse to be other than loyal to a great ideal. The men who submit to them do it readily for the sake of an end which they dare not deny ; but they do not choose them for themselves, far less do they go out of their way in order to seek them. The limitations and sufferings which are their common and constant lot come to them in the order of nature and out of the hand of God. They are the cup which their Father hath given them to drink. Men who go out of their way to seek privations and to submit to limitations find their own secret consolations and their private solace. But the sufferings which come from God's hands are common to all the saints ; and, when they accept them with meekness, they bear them together and they are drawn through bearing them into an intimate and enduring and common relation to their Master.

The book, accordingly, has no complaint against suffering nor does it even seek to turn men's minds away from it. The promise of heavenly reward is not held up, far less is it insisted on and heightened, in order to make

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suffering forgotten. Heaven itself does not and cannot forget it, since heaven has only been made possible through the passion of Christ. John shows nothing of the *morne* note which is present in Daniel. He writes, as one who knows how, through having borne his share in the common lot of all Christian men, there have come into his life an enlargement of heart and a liberty which he could never otherwise have known.

It is this feature in his thought which counteracts and fulfils what he has elsewhere to say about Christ. Thinking along cosmological lines, he set Christ at a somewhat awful distance, and made Him a little different from the one who lived among men, full of grace and truth. But, when he touches on the faithfulness of the saints in their constant trials, how simply and tenderly their Lord draws near to them. They become His in the intimacies of a relation of which the world can know nothing, because the world has turned its back on the only road by which the discovery can be made.

And, when we hold together the two thoughts on which the prophet dwells in connection with Jesus—Jesus, the alpha and the omega, the beginning of the creation of God, and Jesus, the first martyr and the One who bore the sorrow of the world for its redemption—we realise the full significance of what he had to say. Ultimately it was an enrichment of the thought of God. God had His share in the suffering of the world, because He redeemed it. The Old Testament had no similar note. The one passage which hints at how “in all their affliction He was afflicted” is too uncertain in its text and too isolated, even though the text could be accepted, to carry much help to afflicted men. God out of His sovereign power and awful will

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renewed His world, was the older message. But John could say that God had stooped to take His part in the suffering of a world which had come upon it through its breaking away from His order. The glory of heaven was more glorious to the prophet, because it also was acquainted with grief.



## CHAPTER XIV

### The Passion of Christ in John

THE thought of Christ's Passion has influenced very deeply all John's attitude and has coloured his entire outlook. He looks at it from many sides and always finds in it something to uplift the heart and quicken the imagination. The idea has not yet become a theological tenet with him, for he can look at it from many points of view. The theologian who has erected it into a dogma is apt to see it only in the aspect which agrees with his construction of it, and sometimes is afraid to look at it from any but the one side, lest he should be thought to belittle the significance of a straitened dogmatic interpretation.

Hence in his opening sentences, when he announces his purpose and declares his authority, the prophet can speak of Jesus as "the faithful martyr, the first born of the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth." There John is conscious of the Church to which he is writing, a Church which was being called to bear witness in a hostile world even at the cost of martyrdom. He was conscious of the strain this situation was bringing on these men, because it had brought a strain on himself. Conscious, also, where inspiration had come to him, he wrote about the Lord of all Christian men, as the first martyr, who did not keep this glory to Himself, but did His servants the honour to

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expect a like greatness from them. Only One who had passed through martyrdom had a right to be a ruler. But, having borne His witness and having suffered for it, He had entered on His rule, held it in His gift and brought His servants into it, making them also a kingdom.

Again, John wrote of the song of heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power"; and thought of the Passion from another angle. Much of the tragedy of the world comes from power passing into the wrong hands, unfit to wield it, because they are unfit to recognise its responsibility and its testing quality on themselves. Even more of the tragedy of the world is due to the extent to which power degrades the men who gain it. The test of all men and, it may be added, of all parties comes in the day of their power. It tests them by bringing out with merciless clearness the ends for which they have desired it and to which they now apply it. The subtle temptation of power, the amazing degradations it has wrought in character, are due to its inevitable result in bringing out the unconfessed desires and secret appetites, which lay concealed under the inhibitions of custom and poverty and weakness. The real man stands revealed, often stands revealed to himself, in the hour when he dare show himself for what he is. Jesus to John's mind was worthy to receive power, for He had saved others, Himself He could not save. One, who had passed through that test and exercised that self-control under it, had a right to power, for He could be trusted to exercise it wisely, reverently, greatly.

To one with this qualification could even be committed the task of carrying out the judgments of Almighty

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God. The judgments of God were the wrath of the Lamb. The prophet deliberately applies the word to One whom he had already described as qualified through His meekness to open the book of God's counsel, and through His example to inspire the patience of His followers. Yet His wrath has the content of the judgments of God. Probably John was influenced to some extent by the distinct memory of the evangelist who related how the Lord, in the very time when He came to Jerusalem to die for the world, drove the money-changers out of the temple with a whip of knotted cords. He may also, however, have recognised how often human wrath is ineffective, and deserves to be, because it is not allied with or founded on meekness. Anger, instead, draws its force from party interest or selfish ambition or personal disappointment or even hurt vanity. Men flare up into ready indignation when their personal interests are endangered, or when they are crossed in their ambitions; and their indignation is naturally held cheap, being worth no more than the motive which gave rise to it and informs it all. But the indignation of a charity, balanced, pure, tender, patient, has grave significance and a needed influence in the world's business.

Yet none of these aspects, nor all of them together serve to exhaust the place which his Lord's Passion takes in John's thought. He regards it as more than an example to the Church or a rebuke to men's false thoughts about authority: he gives it a place by itself, as the crowning act by which Jesus fulfils His great task of working out the redemption of the world. Thus he begins by saying, "grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits which

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are before His throne and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful martyr, the first born of the dead." But immediately, as though he felt that this description of his Master involved no more than to make Him a link in the constant succession of the divine revelation, he breaks into a little doxology, "unto Him who loveth us and loosed (or washed) us from our sins by His blood, and He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto His God and Father, to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever." The right of Jesus to the reverent adoration of His servants does not finally rest on anything which He revealed of God in a message about His will; it rests on what He did; and what He did was to die in order to save men from their sin. The final revelation of God in which Christian men can rejoice is that Jesus gave Himself to death for them. Again, when the prophet saw the great multitude of the victors arrayed in white robes and with palms in their hands, and when he asked who they were and whence they came, he received for answer that "these are they which are come out of the great tribulation and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God." John realised, for he had been describing it, the extreme character of the test through which the infant Church was about to pass. He pressed home the need for endurance, because he recognised that men would need all the support they could find. And he said that the final support which was fitted to stay up their fainting hearts was to be found in what God had done for the salvation of men in the Passion of Christ. The saying implies more than the sense of Christ, the supreme example of triumphant patience who inspires His followers to a like patience,



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and is closely linked to John's thought of divine predestination. What men have to rest upon is what God has done for them. It would be unjust to the prophet to suppose that he had a clear-cut theory on the subject, which offered a consistent and full statement. But it is also unjust to make his statement mean no more than the force and the inspiration of a great example. His language is picturesque and full of symbolism ; he thinks always in figures. But all the figures which he does not borrow or adapt meant something quite real to him. When, therefore, he spoke of the saints as washed in the blood of Christ, he meant that the Lord's Passion brought something which gave sinful men a standing before God.

It might be enough to say that the conception came naturally to him, because he had seen, as every Christian man had seen, the Passion of the Lord. No disciple who had lived through the final year of the Master's life, or had heard an adequate record of what was its culmination, could ever omit the Passion from his thought about Jesus. And anyone who had originally been a Jew was even less likely than another to omit this feature of the life work of Him whom he had learned to acknowledge as Messiah. For the suffering to death, and especially to the death on the Cross, was to the Jew a stumbling-block. When a man has stumbled over anything, he is more likely to magnify it than to ignore its existence. But John does not leave the impression of having found any difficulty in admitting the thought of suffering into his way of construing the work of One whom he had come to accept as Messiah. And, even if he had found it a difficulty, it is important to ask whether anything in his

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way of approaching Christianity helped him to overcome the stumbling-block which the Cross set in the way of other Jews. Was there anything in the apocalyptic attitude which supplied a point of contact with the thought of suffering and vicarious suffering?

The germ of the line of thought seems to be present in the way in which prophecy conceived its function in Israel. A fundamental element in this function consisted in the prophet's right and duty to pray for his people. The earliest prophet, of whose utterances we have any complete knowledge, relates how he interceded on behalf of his nation, and how at his intercession God passed over Israel's sin. Only when the sin had reached so great a height as to make it impossible for God to keep silence, did his intercession become unavailing, Amos 7<sup>19</sup>. We may pass over the difficult question of what was believed to qualify the prophet for the task of intercession. It is sufficient here to emphasise the fact that from the beginning the prophet was believed to come, not merely to announce the divine judgment, but to intervene between God and His reaction against human sin. How radical the idea became to all thought of the place of prophecy is seen in the well-known verse in Jeremiah (15<sup>1</sup>); "though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight." That the function of intercession in connection with national sin is here associated with these two great names in their character as prophets is clear. For, though Samuel is also called a priest, it is the earlier account which so regards him, while the later thrusts his functions of prophet and judge into the foreground; indeed to the later generation he becomes the new founder of a

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prophetic order. Besides, he is here associated with Moses, and, according to Hosea, Jeremiah's great teacher, "by a prophet the Lord brought Israel up out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved." Hence an entire chapter of the book of Daniel is practically given up to a prayer in which Daniel appears "confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God" (c. 9). Thereafter in close connection with the prayer for the people, the prophet receives his revelation of its future (c. 10).

But the classic instance is the case of Moses on the occasion of the national apostasy in the worship of the golden calf (Exod. 32<sup>30ff.</sup>). Moses said then to the people, "Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make atonement for your sin." When, however, Moses did go up, he went up alone, and he offered no sacrifice. Instead he offered a prayer, the terms of which are significant, "This people have sinned a great sin. . . Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin;—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." In this late account appear in combination prophet, intercession, and vicarious atonement.

Probably it is along this line of approach that we can best understand the great utterance in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. The chapter is, of course, difficult and still much and justly debated. But one or two things stand clearly out in connection with it after the discussion. On the one hand, the idea of vicarious suffering is too definitely impressed on the chapter to be denied or ignored. It remains difficult to determine precisely what the writer



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conceived to be the efficacy or the purpose of the vicarious suffering about which he wrote: but that he believes in such suffering and brings it into close connection with the forgiveness of sin seems undeniable. On the other hand, while the great figure presented may be construed as referring to an individual or to ideal Israel, the connection between it and prophecy is close in either case. For, if it be ideal Israel, it is Israel fulfilling the divinely appointed task of the prophet-nation among the other nations of the world, to which reference is made. If it is some individual of whom the writer speaks, he has borrowed certain features from the life and fate of some great prophet in order to express his thought. In either case, the vicarious suffering for sin is brought into close connection with the function of the prophet, and, it may be added, it appears among the utterances of a prophet.

To account for the presence of vicarious suffering appeal has been taken to the sacrificial system; and certain features in the chapter undoubtedly point to the writer having been acquainted with, if not influenced by, the sacrificial system. But, while one must acknowledge grave uncertainty in connection with the entire cult of old Israel and recognise that its profound influence on the religious life of the nation has been unduly neglected or even ignored by modern students, personally I am convinced that the idea of vicarious suffering or even of vicarious death does not appear in it at all. If, therefore, the prophet clothed his thought in language which reminded his readers of the sacrificial system, this does not imply his having borrowed more than the language. The idea itself, the interpretation of the language, is



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what he has himself supplied. And, if it should be said that he has aimed at spiritualising the sacrificial system, there need be no quarrel with the statement, so long as it is recognised that the man who supplies the spirit either to words or to rites supplies everything that really matters.

Now, if the duty and the privilege of intercession for men could rise to the height which it is represented to have reached in the prayer of Moses, the height of agony for the people of a prophet's love—and surely the experience of Jeremiah proves the possibility—it supplies the point of connection for the vicarious suffering which found its immortal expression for Israel in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

The idea then of vicarious suffering, not, be it noted, of penal suffering, was native to prophecy. Probably prophecy was hospitable to the conception, because its whole system of thought was radically predestinarian. To it salvation was of the Lord. Man was not saved through any merit of his own, but through the mere grace of God, a grace which expressed itself in act. To a theology which magnifies the divine purpose and the divine decree the idea of vicariousness has always come naturally.

This, however, is a question for theologians. What directly concerns us here is to recognise the line along which John, a Jew who belonged to the apocalyptic school, could reach his thought of the Passion of Christ. He also has no teaching on suffering as penal, though he believes in it as vicarious. It has a close connection with his predestinarian theology. For Christ's Passion is no mere message concerning God's will for man's redemption:

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it is the act by which God's will for the redemption of the world is brought into fulfilment. Because it is this, it is the basis of the faith and the perseverance of the saints. What gives them their access to God is what gave their religious life its reality—the deed of God for their redemption. And further, because John thinks of the Passion along this line, he brings it into close association with the prayers of the Church. For prayer, to him and to all the prophets, was an act of intercession and of redemption. Before Christ are presented the prayers offered by the saints to God. Their prayers are given a meaning through Him, for, when saints pray they always pray for the kingdom of God to come. Jesus who has brought and is still to bring the kingdom can and does receive prayers which have a meaning because of what He is. But their prayers have a deeper meaning still, for they are the continuation of His work. To intercede with God for His world is to redeem.

It is obvious how the idea of continuity of life in the Redeemer and His Church could not come to its own, so long as redemption was expected by direct intervention. Only when redemption ceased to be cataclysmic and construed in terms of cataclysm, could the saints share in it, not merely by accepting its benefits, but by continuing its influence. But it is equally obvious how again apocalyptic proves itself essentially evangelical in tone and outlook, and in hopeless disagreement with legalism. When men begin all their thought of salvation from what God does, they rest their scheme of redemption, not on good works, but on the will and the grace of God. Predestination, conversion by direct intervention of God, vicarious suffering have been found congruent ideas through all the

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Christian centuries, and through all these centuries they have proved uneasy neighbours to the conception of salvation by good works or by regulated and appointed means of grace. And, as the Roman Church made careful terms with Augustinianism and expelled Luther, so the Rabbis finally turned away from prophecy and apocalypse.

## CHAPTER XV

### The Two Great Protagonists

(CHAPTERS VIII to XVIII)

WHEN we reach this stage in the exposition of the book, the difficulties which arise from attempting the task in a volume of the size and scope of the present become extreme. The materials John has collected are extraordinarily heterogeneous, varying from the adaptation of a nature-myth to represent the primæval war in heaven to what seems to be the description of the clever tricks employed by the priests of the Imperial cult in deceiving the vulgar. His arrangement is hopelessly illogical, since he breaks off his description of the coming woes with little apparent cause and resumes it with as little visible reason. Now the scene is in Jerusalem, again it shifts to Rome and again we find ourselves transported to the celestial world. An expositor can scarcely attempt to interpret the message without giving some account of the way in which he arranges the materials, and yet he cannot here find room adequately to discuss such mere preliminary questions. I am painfully conscious how unsatisfactory the early half of this chapter must appear to readers: the hiatuses are many and the transitions are abrupt.

Before proceeding then to depict the two great figures, whose final struggle is to result in the collapse of the power of evil and the ushering in of the end, John describes a



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new series of disasters, heralded by the angels with seven trumpets, Chapters VIII.—XI. His action in so doing is apt to bewilder and weary the modern reader, because his literary method differs entirely from our own. The calamities which follow on the blasts of the seven trumpets do not seem to bring us to a point further than that to which the succession of woes, which attended the opening of the seals, has already led.

We are left at the close of the trumpets, where we were left at the close of the seals, expecting in each case a *dénouement* which does not arrive. And we are naturally led to suppose that the one series of woes is successive in time to the other, because the series of the seals gives place to that of the trumpets and indeed is merged in it.

In reality, the opening of the last seal does not connect with the beginning of the trumpets, as though the one gave rise to the other, nor are the two series connected in time. They describe the same subject, the woes which must precede the coming of the end, from two slightly different points of view. The seals describe these as arriving directly from the will of God and insist on their result for the saints. Hence the woes themselves are very slightly described. They are hurried over in comparison with the real question which interests the seer, *viz.*, the end they serve for Christian men. Hence, too, the great figure of Messiah bulks much more in the picture, for the woes are merely preliminary to and serve the purpose of redemption. They are intended to introduce the final glory of the redeemed. On the other hand, the woes in Chapters VIII.—XI. are chiefly regarded from the point of view of their effect on the sinful world. They are, therefore, mainly for judgment. The world can only be brought

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back from the condition of disorder into which it has fallen by a judgment which shall purge out its hopeless elements. The whole movement accordingly takes its origin from a peculiar starting-point: it takes its origin from the prayer of the saints. The prayer of the saints, and especially the cry of their sufferings, sets in motion the intervention of the Almighty. What He has determined is set on foot in consequence of the condition of the world, a world which, as we have already seen, has brought itself to such a pass that its chosen souls are suffering and through their suffering are calling on God to vindicate His cause. For the prayer of the saints is primarily a prayer that God would prove the world to be His and to be under His righteous government. Practically their prayer is that God's kingdom should come and His will should be done on earth as it is in heaven. This prayer is ever heard amid the glory of heaven, for the need of His world is ever present to the heart of God, and the expression of its need always reaches His ear.

Yet the very fact which calls for the intervention of the Almighty, the failure of the world to fulfil His will, proves to the prophet how a better condition cannot come except through terrific calamities, which are the divine judgments on human sin. The proof that the prayer is being answered comes therefore in the form of the angel figures with their trumpets, bringing woe on a world which must be purged before it can return to its Creator. But now, because the prophet is regarding the matter from the side of judgment, because the proof of the need for a reconciled world springs from the fact that the only thing the present world can do with the men who pray for the coming of God's kingdom in it is to make them

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martyrs, the Messiah does not appear ; and instead of the woes being hastened over, they are described in detail. It is judgment following swift on judgment against a world which must bear the outcome of its sin.

The actual series of judgments is described in tolerably conventional terms, and only two points seem to deserve note. The one is that the first four trumpet blasts summon to activity powers which devastate the earth, the sea, the waters and the sky, while the last three, which are specially called woes and which for the first time introduce demonic agents, concern themselves with human beings, the God—forgetting inhabitants of the earth. It would be a mistake to conclude that the calamities which fall on the earth fall on it in order thereby to affect, and merely in order to affect, the human beings who are its inhabitants. More probably John continues true to his Jewish tradition, which did not absolutely separate inanimate nature from human life. According to this tradition, not merely were men to be brought back to seemly order of life, but the earth was to be transformed into the earth of the redemption. As John in his first vision had seen the four beasts, emblems of the world forces worshipping God, now he believes that the nature forces need to become more than nature forces, even the means for furthering the kingdom of God.

Another matter, which has already been dwelt on in some detail, calls merely for passing notice. The fact that the prophet repeated the woes at greater length permitted him to introduce allusions to the actual conditions which prevailed in the world of his time and specially to fears which were deeply moving men. Thus in 9<sup>th</sup> his selection of the name Apollyon seems to be aimed at the fact that Caligula and Nero had imitated the deity of



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Apollo. In a way which appealed greatly to the Hebrew mind in all its history he punned upon the word, making it equivalent to the Hebrew word for hell.<sup>1</sup> This passion for deification he would say was due to diabolical suggestion. But a more interesting and instructive example of his method is found, where he refers to the nervous dread which prevailed throughout the world of Asia Minor as to the threatened irruption of the Parthians. The Parthians played a part in the popular imagination, similar to that which in a later period was occupied by the Huns. They were as little known and as greatly feared. They came out of the unknown, and were regarded as possessed of mysterious powers, since they came from the Euphrates valley, the notorious haunt of uncanny influences and occult agencies. With this mysterious dread in men's minds had come to ally itself the belief that Nero was still alive. Nero had not really died but had found refuge among the Parthians, and at their head, furthered by the mysterious agencies over which the tribes had power, Nero *redivivus* was to return and to over-run the precarious civilisation of the West. Evidently the prophet knew that these fears were common, even among the communities of the Christians, for at 9<sup>13f</sup>, he went a little out of his way to emphasise that this was one among the woes which were permitted and even ordained of God. The angels of the Euphrates were loosed, which had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year. They were thus prepared and they were always controlled by God. No Christian man need be in too great dismay before these weird misgivings, for the worst men dreaded was part

<sup>1</sup> Apollyon = Ἀπώλεια, the equivalent in the Septuagint for Abaddon, which again in Hebrew is used for Sheol.



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of the woes which God was sending for the chastisement of the world.

Evidently, therefore, the prophet meant that the woes which ushered in the end had already begun and were to increase. In the aspect in which he was now regarding them, they were to punish the sinful world, and, instead of reforming it, to harden it in its opposition to God's will. Men only hated the better order the more, the more the disorder of their lives brought its inevitable end in failure and misery. They turned more resolutely to seek their own way, in spite of the fact that their own way was resulting in ever deepening sorrow and shame. The two opposing forces drew themselves apart, defined themselves more clearly, and stood forth for their final and desperate grapple. The sin of the world not only revealed itself in its persecution of Christian men who stood forth witnesses for a saner and sweeter order: it also revealed itself in the fact that bad men were incorrigible. They could not learn even from the fearful warning given them through the failure of their own efforts. The two great protagonists appear for their final struggle, Anti-Christ and Christ. Because, however, the end is here regarded from the point of view of its effect on a world which has proved itself incorrigible, Messiah is the judge rather than the redeemer. He comes forth against His antagonist. Jesus, who has hitherto been described as the end of God for His world, who, because He is the end, can also reveal it, now becomes the leader of the struggle. He was the victor long ago, as He was the end fore-ordained before time was. What Jesus was in the counsel and purpose of the Almighty, the One who summed up the world's destiny and who could declare it, He is now

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to become. "He shall reign for ever and ever." The kingdom is passing to reality in the world: but, as it passes to reality, there rises to confront it what has always been opposed to it, what now declares itself nakedly, and this power makes its last effort, daring but despairing because foredoomed to failure.

It is foredoomed, because, in the view of John, the fight has already been fought out in heaven. What is now to be transacted on the stage of the world has already been acted out in the purpose of the Almighty. To express this idea, the prophet borrowed two old nature-myths, the woman clothed with the sun and the great dragon (chap. 12). Nothing, in my judgment, can show the modern reader more clearly than these two stories do the remarkable world of thought in which the early Christian Church was living. That a Christian prophet was able to use a figure of this character at all in order to convey his religious ideas gives a singular impression of the sources from which devout men were deriving their impressions of truth. The difficulty does not lie in any leaning towards Mariolatry which may be found here, but rather in the absence of any real positive Christian content. Thus, to select the most significant feature, the actual protagonist on the side of good and of the Church becomes a mere lay-figure. Christ practically fulfils no rôle, except that of a child, whose birth causes consternation to the dragon. But what Christ is in Himself, what there is in His personality or in His life which arouses the angry dismay of the power of evil is nowhere even hinted. Now this is the more remarkable, because John has proved how well able he was, by little hints and touches, to indicate what it was in his Lord which at the same time won the allegiance of His

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servants and roused the alarmed animosity of His enemies. The Lamb who was slain was one who had acted and who by His deeds had won the passionate adoration of His martyred followers. He was also one who by His life had set up an ideal of authority which conflicted with the common standards of the world. But the child who was merely born and conveyed away into the desert really suggests nothing of significance for good or evil.

Further, the alien source and suggestion of the incident cling as obstinately round the mother as round the child. The sun, moon and seven planets which surround her, as has already been stated, patently bring her into close relation to physical nature. And she herself utterly refuses to range herself in any Christian interpretation of her function. If she is understood as Mary of Nazareth, these features harmonise not at all with the mother who could find no better shelter than a stable for her birth-pangs, and her help then and always did not come from the earth. If, on the other hand, she represents the Jewish Church which bore Messiah, her being hid in the wilderness for a period is quite singularly inappropriate. If, again, she is construed as the Christian Church, it is difficult to see how the Church could produce Messiah who Himself originated the Church.

Probably John has done what we have already seen him doing in connection with Chapter VII. He has one thought in his mind, how the clash which is pending before the consummation was the culmination of a war which was as old as time. The struggle was not of yesterday, but stretched back into the very beginning. Being old and inveterate, it had accompanied man's life from the beginning and had been dimly foreshadowed in many of man's past



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thoughts on his destiny. There was to be the final exhibition, not only of the great struggle, but of the protagonists in it. He found this old story in circulation, which had probably affected his own imagination and was profoundly affecting the imagination of the men to whom he was writing. He used it, therefore, for the particular end which he desired: but he ignored the fact that, in many of its features and especially in its beginning it was singularly incapable of being made amenable to any Christian treatment, and was an unsuitable medium for conveying his thought.

As the prophet broke off the Jewish apocalypse of Chapter VII., so he broke off his myth in Chapters XII. with the statement as to war having been in heaven, after which he continued his own interpretation of the material he had used. We hear no more of the fate of the woman and the child: these are mere accessories in his mind. He is hurrying on to emphasise that the present condition of the world is to be the repetition of the older war. Satan has come down to earth with his fury and malice quickened into livelier activity, because he is engaged in his last despairing effort. For the purpose of this last war against the forces of order, Satan has conferred his power on the Roman Empire, which is the present representative of the devil (Chap. XIII.). And, as Christ and Satan stood against each other in heaven, their earthly counterparts, the Church and the Empire stand over against each other on earth. And the claims of the Empire are forcing on the attention of every man the ultimate question whether he means to serve Christ or the devil. The Emperor, through assuming the blasphemous title of *divus* has become no less than the



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representative of the ancient enemy who has always set himself up against God. It does not appear to me to make any great difference whether the number of the beast is best interpreted by the letters of the name of this or that Emperor. The prophet would have applied it to any Emperor who claimed the name of divine. It was this blasphemous claim, whoever made it, which gave him his infamy. The Empire too imposed on men through its apparently irresistible power, for it had seemed to be wounded to death, but had always recovered. One sees there a reference to the fascinated wonder with which the provincials must have watched the amazing recuperative power of Rome. When the news filtered through to Asia Minor of the convulsions which seemed to portend the speedy and utter dissolution of the vast structure about 69 A.D., men must have whispered together in all the cities, some with novel hopes of liberty gleaming in their eyes, others with a shiver of apprehension as to all that such a collapse might portend. And, when Vespasian gripped the tiller, the instant response of the great ship to its master must have equally disappointed the hopes of some and calmed the fears of others: but it must have amazed all. The prophet, too, could acknowledge Rome's power to impose on the imagination of men. It could speak great things, so great as almost to justify its blasphemy. Nothing seemed beyond its power, so that it held the world's imagination in thrall. It had also much to offer men. The good things of the world were in its hands and were freely bestowed on all who were willing to acknowledge its authority. Many had risen against it, but not one of them had prevailed; it held power over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.

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Now it was daring to claim an authority which it had never ventured to demand before. It was claiming the name and authority of God. Its officials, the priests of the cult of Cæsar, whom John calls the other beast which exercised the power of the first, were everywhere. They were grossly deceiving the superstitious by pretended miracles and by their appeal to the greed, ambition and false patriotism of many others. They were full of suave appeals to all the motives which specially move men. But always and everywhere their influence and power were exerted in only one direction. They were moving to make the authority of the outward world recognised in the shrine of every man's private devotion. Only one authority must be recognised sooner or later wherever their power extended. Already they were thrusting themselves into the most personal relations of daily life. The coins by which men bought their daily food were stamped with the emblems of the one authority. Whether they bore the head of Cæsar, or the effigies of the gods, or the symbol of Rome, they bore the mark of the beast ; and to use them was in some measure to own its authority. The imperial cultus was spreading like an unclean fungus into all the intimate relations of every man's life, making it impossible for men to live at all without being brought into contact with it. Sooner or later, every man was confronted by it, in buying his food, in burying his dead, in doing his simplest work. The ideal for which the Empire stood was soaking into and tainting the whole social life, in which Christian men were called to live. The image was set up again by an emperor's order on the plain of Dura, and the old question was back in its full rigour : to whom is a man's final allegiance due ?

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Having thus described the great enemy who is Anti-Christ, it might have been expected that John should at once have proceeded to describe his overthrow. But instead he harks back to a new series of woes, which are represented in tolerably similar terms to those in which the earlier woes appeared (Chaps. XIV.-XVI.). Perhaps the prophet's aim was to insist that the outcome of the wickedness which had culminated in the ascription of divine honour to the Emperor could only be sorrow upon sorrow. The extremity of blasphemous claim involved in the Imperial cult must result in instant judgment. What makes such a supposition likely is that the woes here detailed culminate (in Chapters XVII. and XVIII.), in the ruin of the guilty city, Rome. What has made the calamity inevitable must be swept away, before the earth can breathe again. The main lines of the doom on Rome come from a Jewish hand. The resemblance to certain Old Testament oracles foretelling the overthrow of Babylon is unmistakable, and it might therefore be supposed that John himself had composed the section in imitation of earlier prophecies, but here again, as in Chapter XIII., Messiah plays no rôle at all. The Christian character of the whole is of the slightest, and the colouring is alien. It appears as though the Jewish stamp was so strongly impressed on the material before it reached John's hands that no room could be found for the figure of Christ.

What the prophet was aiming at was to make clear to the minds of the men for whose lives he was toiling, the character and deadly subtlety of the peril which was all round them, and to show how sure and near was its downfall. His mind was so full of this purpose, and he was so engrossed in emphasising the special side of the judgment



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on the world that the figure of the Lord more readily sank into the background for him. What his Christian fellow sufferers must see, if it was possible for him to make them see it, was that there was no room for hesitation any more. Here he was using the favourite Hebrew device of reiteration in order to insist on the certainty of the event. The woes are not really additional woes: they are the earlier ones repeated.

To the prophet, then, the Roman Empire in its claim for the worship of the emperor and in its effort to control the conscience of men was anti-Christ, and its pretensions were so profoundly impious as to demand and make sure the intervention of the Almighty. Wickedness could go no further, and, when wickedness had done its work, the end must come. But it would be a mistake to conclude that this implies a judgment on the Roman Empire in itself, and hence on every empire which can be compared with the Roman. It is an interesting exercise, after having read the book of Revelation, to read the letters of Pliny, author of the famous report to the Emperor on the character and conduct of the Christians in Asia Minor. Pliny was not only an official in the empire, but the descendant of a long line of Roman gentlemen who had been accustomed to govern, who indeed thought of themselves as born to govern the world. And, when we have discounted his affectations and tried to forget his touching efforts to write like Cicero, we find ourselves in contact with a courteous and manly Roman. His ideals are a little narrow, but they are perfectly sincere. He loves truth and honour and fair dealing. He has the fundamental basis for all courtesy, a genuine recognition of the rights of other men. And, though his conception of other men's rights is a little



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dulled by the serene confidence that well-born Romans are not quite like other men, within its limits it is honest and above all powerful enough to influence his attitude toward his fellows. He has the Vergilian faith that it is Rome's function to rule the world, but he has nothing of the baser Roman's confidence that it is her privilege in return to exploit it. Nothing would have startled him more than to have been told that the Empire was there to debase the moral currency of the world, or to use the opportunities it could offer to common men and the rewards it could place within their reach in order to make them traitors to their consciences and faithless to their gods. He probably believed sincerely that Rome was doing its best to hold the balance between the warring faiths which found an equal protection under the ægis of its power. As for that Imperial cult business, he probably shrugged his shoulders at it, if he thought about it at all, as a mere political device which helped to support the frame-work of the Empire by appealing to the queer instinct which impelled most men to find some emblem they could worship. It seemed to suit a type of mind, but no cultured man ever thought of taking it seriously. Meantime Rome was there, policing the world, keeping back the weird hordes of the Cimmerian darkness beyond, and maintaining fairly decent order within its own bounds. Men must serve Rome loyally, though of course she was no longer the noble Rome of the good old days, when gentlemen were gentlemen. And, when the Emperor asked this pro-consul to send in a report on the Christians in his province, he wrote that he found them quite worthy people, who practised certain curious but innocent rites in their novel worship. It never dawned on the excellent governor's mind that in

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the hearts of the Puritans about whom he wrote there was growing up the conviction that he and all for which he stood were anti-Christ, the very antithesis of all which they revered most, and all which they were prepared to die for rather than deny. Men were rising there who said about such pro-consuls as himself: "They worship the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast?" And because of them and their attitude, the whole world must be shaken down in judgment by the act of God.

Two ideals were clashing, and, as always happens, the men who stood for each of these, were unable even to understand each other's language. And who shall say that it was not needful for the world to find that there were men who believed that it was a blasphemy to call a political device a religion and who kept both their lip-service and their heart-service for what they believed to be true? And who shall say that it was not wholesome for Rome to learn that power, when it passed its limits, was a curse, or that to exact a reverence to which none had a right but God was to juggle with the very basis of its just and legitimate authority? It was not force in itself embodied in the Empire against which John protested: it was force passing beyond its limits, exacting what it had no right to demand, and thus losing its own basis and destroying its own claim. But that force had its legitimate and even necessary place in any universe governed by God the prophet believed, and he showed his faith in the most eloquent way since he taught that God, by the exercise of His power, was to bring in the new order, and by the exercise of His power was to maintain it. Force to him was the guarantee of order. The earlier prophets who expected the divine kingdom to be set up on this side of time and who set

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Messiah over it, had no hesitation about equipping Him with sufficient might to enable Him to restrain any elements of confusion which might continue in it or to repel any attacks which might arrive from outside. "He shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." Force to them was the means by which order was made possible and the guarantee of its continued presence. John was able to write of the four creatures, the great brute forces of nature, worshipping the God from whom they draw their existence and from whom also they received their guidance. What the prophet objected to was force which had escaped from the guidance and control of God and which was therefore deifying itself, because it owned no higher law. He believed he saw the Roman Empire doing precisely this thing, and to him it became at once anti-Christ.

It was, accordingly, in harmony with this prophetic teaching that, when the Church had ceased to expect the immediate coming of the Lord and had settled down to recognise that the kingdom was not to arrive through a direct exercise of power on the part of God, it had no hesitation in making terms with the Empire and in taking a new attitude towards it. In fact, it was bound to do exactly this thing. So long as the kingdom was to be set up by an act, direct and immediate, on the part of God, the force which was to introduce and guarantee the new order could be left in the hands of God; He was to set up the kingdom through the forth-putting of His power. But, when the restoration of all things was expected through the patience of Christian men, they could no longer evade the responsibility of using every means



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by which it could be reached, or, when partly reached, could be maintained. And, though power was a dangerous instrument, danger absolves no man from his duty. Power was to be made subservient to moral ends.

When the Empire had become influenced by Christian ideals and the Emperor himself could profess Christianity, the Church was found accepting furtherance from its old enemy. Many are able to see in the new position which emerged under Constantine nothing except a complete departure on the part of Christian men from their former ideals and a submission to the ideals of the world. They insist that all the inevitable compromises which resulted were made at the cost of the Church's spiritual message. But sweeping generalisations of this kind are rarely of much value ; and, if it is foolish to publish an indictment against a nation, it is doubly foolish to issue an indictment against a community which has come together round an ideal. It may be legitimate to urge that the alliance went too far, and that the terms of Constantine's agreement brought with it an infiltration of the aims and methods of a purely earthly kingdom into the spiritual realm. But it is not legitimate to regard this as a mere betrayal of the original basis on which the Church was set. It was the readjustment of attitude which inevitably followed, when the coming of the kingdom was no longer expected through the forth-putting of divine power. It became part of the perilous duty of Christian men to make power subject to God, and to find a means by which it could become the guarantee of all good order. To do otherwise would have been to admit a moral dualism in the government of the world. It is idle to claim on the one side that the coming of the kingdom is gradual and



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must therefore be carried out by the agency of man, and on the other side altogether to abjure force. So to do is merely to acknowledge that there is an element in man and in the world which cannot be moralised. Every policeman is the expression of humanity's faith that force is the legitimate guarantee of good order.

Because this is true we find Augustine recognising the disaster which must befall the world, not merely in physical comfort but in spiritual outlook, if the Empire collapsed before the barbarians. It was to the bishop the guarantee of all seemly government. One cannot think of the Roman Empire to-day without sympathy and wonder. It succeeded in much in which our world has failed. It brought and kept all the North African coast within the pale of European civilisation: it made Anatolia a land of fair cities and active life. The Balkans under it ceased for a time to be a place where men cut each other's throats with impunity. It secured the freedom of the sea by policing it against pirates. Its long roads ran across the severed lands, and, ignoring all frontiers, linked the world together with some sense of mutual interest and a common debt. It made trade possible and the interchange of thought as real as that of wares. Its justice followed the roads which the legions had built; and its law brought a higher sense of the value of human life and the security of man's gains. The modern railways run up the valleys where the long straight highways first bottomed the morasses and opened up the thickets. The Roman ideals of law and justice are recognisable beneath the modern forms of jurisprudence. Life is still borrowing on every hand from what the Cæsars accomplished and it is worthier because they ruled. Augustine, as Roman and Christian,

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was too sane to ignore what must be the issue if the Empire should go, and too wise to pretend that the loss did not matter. Only he comforted his heart with the recognition that even if it must go, the city of God remaineth. For the love of good order is planted deep in the heart of man, and good order itself is the will of God. Order will begin again to harness force as its servant and to make it its guarantee. And men who love a wise and disciplined life will never be content, until it is protected, assured and made real in the world in which God has given men the task to realise it.

## CHAPTER XVI

### The Resurrection and the Millennium

I SET these two subjects together, because they represent the two chief elements in connection with the future which Christianity took over from Judaism and give the opportunity to point out the main line of development on the question. Here, even more than elsewhere, one regrets that it is impossible to deal with or include the extra-canonical apocalypses, for, as compared with the richness of the teaching of a book like *Enoch*, Daniel contains a meagre contribution and introduces in a casual fashion even the little which it has to say. The theme is not really dealt with by the earlier prophet, it is only touched upon.

The interest, however, shown in the problem by books like *Enoch* and the advance in clearness of teaching there serve to press upon the attention of every student the remarkable fact that apocalypse was always interested in the topic. It is significant that the doctrine emerges first in Judaism within the apocalyptic literature, and it is equally noteworthy that nowhere in the New Testament does it come to clearer expression than in the book of Revelation. Yet, at the first glance and especially on the usual interpretation of this school of thought, it was scarcely to be expected that these thinkers should have interested themselves in personal immortality. On

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the one hand, the apocalyptist, with his undeniable sense of the magnitude of the world and of the long process of history, might naturally have been expected to thrust the individual into the background and to think about his fate as merged in the fortunes of the larger community of which he formed a somewhat insignificant part. And, on the other hand, to all who conceive these thinkers as teaching a transcendental idea of God, the interest they display in the question of personal immortality presents a peculiar difficulty. It might rather have been looked for that men who thought of God as standing far aloof from the course of the present world should have counted the swarming and trivial lives of men beneath His regard. What was there in the apocalyptic genius which made it so peculiarly sensitive to the pressure of this question of the fate of the individual soul?

In order to establish some connection between the two lines of thought, recourse has been taken to the influence of foreign ideas, and it has been thought that Judaism was here indebted to neighbouring nations. Now it may be true that Persian speculation had reached certain convictions on the subject of a resurrection, though precisely what these were it is not easy to define and when they were formulated it is still less easy to state. It is also certain that Hellenism was teaching a doctrine of immortality: and influences from both these quarters were telling powerfully on the Jewish mind. But if we consider the Jew to have borrowed from either source, the explanation fails at two crucial points. Thus it cannot give any reason for the fundamental *differences* on the subject between the Greek and the Hebrew. To mention only one, why does the Jew tenaciously hold to the resurrection of the body,



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while the Greek as tenaciously holds to the immortality of the soul? The only reason which appears convincing is that the two sets of thinkers started from utterly divergent points of departure. Further, the explanation generally fails even to recognise that there must have been a point of connection by which these foreign methods of thought, if the Jews borrowed from them, found their way into the Hebrew system. What was the point of connection which made the Jew welcome these alien ideas, and in particular, what was the point of connection with the apocalyptists which made them most ready to give room to a doctrine of immortality? A system based on the conception of God's aloofness from His world was least likely to accept the view that God could stoop to maintain the personal life in its transient weakness. It may be added that it was also least likely to transform a doctrine of the immortality of the soul into one of the resurrection of the body.

The sufficient answer to these perplexing questions is to be found in the recognition of the true nature of prophecy. The prophets from the beginning stood for the personality of God. Because He was personal, he could and should intervene to bring in His day with its new valuations which were the expression of His personal will for His world. Because He was personal, He could and did communicate His mind to the men who were in His secret and whose task it was, not merely to declare the nearness of the day, but to proclaim the standards which characterised it. The inevitable result was to throw emphasis on the individual with his power to choose and live by the divine realities. The nation, as the unit in religion, was gone from the time when Amos said that

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God, in the interests of religion, was going to destroy Israel. The new community, which was to be constituted after the divine intervention, must then consist, not of Israel, but of the remnant. And the remnant was composed of the individual men who accepted the standards of the new order, declared by the prophet before it arrived. Only those who submitted to God's will as their rule for life could pass into the kingdom, but all these must and should. And to them in the consummation of all things God should give all that was needed for a full and blessed life with Him. For the divine intervention implied the removal of everything which in the present constitution of the world made it impossible for God to dwell with men on the earth.

Such a position enormously deepened the worth of the human personality. Fugitive though it was and often sinful, the soul was capable of choosing the standards of God amid the bewildering seductiveness of the world. Though it stood alone and was called to suffer through its new isolation, it was able to do this with courage and hope. Men have rarely lived or died with a happy calm merely for the sake of the nature of things : and, when they asked for a devotion which might imply all life, the prophets had the advantage of believing that they spoke in the name of a personal God, from whose presence they came. They possessed the secret strength which lies in all religion as over against a system of morality : they believed that they had arrived at reality. Every soul, which could in this earthly darkness find God and discover its personality made sure through Him, could face undismayed a world which did not share its convictions, mocked at its attitude and resented its interference.

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But a further question could not be long in rising : Had the soul which trusted God in the present life absolute value ? If such a soul passed into the consummation, having freedom of entry through the mercy of God, should it be still subject to death ? God, when He made the ultimate values real in His day, would sweep away everything which hindered the true life in the present order of His world. He guaranteed everything necessary for the good life to those who were privileged to enter the new order, and above all He was Himself to dwell with the reconciled. The blessedness of the end was to consist in the fact that He could dwell with them ; and it was guaranteed in its continuance through the fact that He did dwell with them, either personally or through His representative, Messiah. Was then the fellowship with God, which made the fulness of the new order, to be still subject to interruption through the accident of death ? Was the great hindrance to a full life on earth, that we are all subject to time and mortality, to be done away, when the fulness of the time was ushered in ? The kingdom itself was eternal, for it was the end and there could be nothing beyond it, but were those who passed into it themselves eternal, or were they still liable to the indignity of death ?

Again the other question pressed as to the men who committed themselves to the will of God, but died before the kingdom was revealed. Since the Hebrew set the consummation on earth and on this side of time, the matter appeared to him to involve, not the immortality of the soul, but the resurrection of the body. If they were to share in the final blessedness, the redeemed must return to the earth. Circumstances also forced the question on the Jew with peculiar urgency. For there were many saints



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who had not only committed themselves to God and trusted in the advent of His day, but had died rather than deny their faith. From the time when Manasseh in his reaction filled the streets of Jerusalem with innocent blood all through Israel's later history, there were the martyrs who had loved God better than their own lives and had passed under the power of death to maintain the eternal standards. Did death to which they submitted prevent their having a share in the consummation? This, it should be noted, was no question primarily of reward or punishment, for to the predestinarian thought of the prophets any possibility of reward was alien. Salvation was of the absolute and merciful gift of God. The real significance of the matter was that it was a question of the character of God and His final values. What was the last magnitude, the kingdom, or the souls of men who made up the kingdom? Was the soul with its eternal choice of God and His standards an ultimate thing?

Now, we find both these questions clearly raised and answered by the prophet who wrote the original prophecy which underlies chapters 24-27 of the book of Isaiah. The fact that they both appear in his little pamphlet proves how intimately they were felt to belong together and recognised as springing from the same root. That the oracles in their completed form were added to the book of Isaiah shows further that the later generation recognised the intimate relation of the chapters to the position of the great prophet of Jerusalem. Isaiah had been the first clearly to teach the doctrine of the remnant, that is, to enunciate the principle that the new society must be constituted on the basis of the individual with his personal conviction and trust in God. No one, therefore,



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had more clearly raised the issue, whether it was the society which was eternal, or the individuals who made it up and for whose sake in large measure it was there.

The prophet answers both questions without hesitation. God "will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that is cast over all peoples and the veil that is spread over all nations. He hath swallowed up death for ever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces" (25<sup>7</sup>). The man was thinking of those who had the felicity to enter on the new order without having been made subject to death. They were not again to lose what through God's great grace to them had been brought within their reach. For the kingdom was one of life and the life in it was eternal. When the consummation had arrived, there was room for nothing but life, and death should cease.

But, further, he wrote about what appeared the vain and hopeless loyalties of the past, "Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain and crieth out in her pangs, so have we been before Thee, O Lord. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth" (26<sup>17</sup>). All the long broken efforts of Israel have been empty of result, if in the end the men who made these efforts passed under the power of death. That this question was in the writer's mind is clear, when it is recognised how in verse 13f. he speaks about the heathen rulers over Israel. "The dead live not, the deceased rise not: Thou hast visited and destroyed them and made all their memory to perish." It seemed quite natural and fitting that the men who had neither had nor desired any share in the kingdom should find no place in it when it was set up. But what of those

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who committed their all to its promises and lived by the faith in its reality? About them the prophet declared, "Thy dead shall live, my dead bodies shall arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of light, and the earth shall cast forth the dead (v 19)." It was but fitting and natural that they should return to share in the end, since they were not only Israel's beloved dead, but God's, not only "thy" dead, but "Mine."

There are two points in connection with this line of thought which deserve to be emphasised. Thus it becomes easy to understand why it was the resurrection of the dead, not the immortality of the soul, which was pondered and taught. The kingdom in which the redeemed were to take their part was believed by the Jew to arrive on this earth. Hence disembodied spirits found no place in it, but souls which functioned through bodies, since the scene of their activity was conceived to lie on this side of time. Further it is noteworthy that the whole question arose to the Hebrew mind, not along the line of speculation, but at the bidding of religion. For the matter was thought of, as it concerned and only as it concerned the faithful dead. What might befall the souls which had failed to face the demands of the new order and had declined to consider its standards was not even considered. Religious thought and religious life could continue among the nation, though men held any views they pleased about the unfaithful and their fate in and after death, or even though they did not think about such men at all. But a strong religious life in Israel was needing and demanding for its full vigour some answer to the question about the faithful departed. Did the lives which committed themselves absolutely to the will of God pass out into the night as transient and futile

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as the men who in their work had never had any contact with reality? Or did these lives, which had put the earth under their feet and in loyalty to conviction defied the threat of death, continue to triumph over death for ever?

What Daniel added here was the teaching that more than the faithful departed should rise in the consummation and that the fate of those who rose should not be equal. He remained faithful to the course of Hebrew thought in declaring that the new life which was then to be made manifest was to be eternal. It was everlasting life to which men should rise. He also believed, not in immortality but in resurrection. Immortality to him was not something inherent in man as man, far less was it due to the spirit which had been imprisoned in a tabernacle of clay, bursting its limits and revealing itself in its native power and liberty. Apparently God gave a resurrection to those to whom He chose, for He did not send it to all. And he taught that all who by word or influence had helped the faithful to endure were to receive a peculiar honour: "the teachers shall shine like the sun and those that turn many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever." One may conclude that this is no more than a distinction given to the souls which have helped their own generation, not that they alone were admitted to the kingdom. And he certainly taught the resurrection of some among the wicked to receive their condemnation. There is no hint that all the evil-doers should rise, but only a number, presumably the worst among them. However, his whole statement on the subject appears to me an *obiter dictum*, incomplete like all such *obiter dicta*. He did not develop his thought in any fulness or clearness.



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Now the attitude of the Old Testament has deeply influenced the writers of the New Testament in connection with the subject of the future life, and, in particular, it naturally influenced the prophet John. Thus he seems undoubtedly to have believed in some form of a millennial advent. Jesus, as Messiah, was to return in person and take up His abode on earth at Jerusalem, a glorified but still an earthly Jerusalem. This Messianic kingdom was to last for one thousand years,<sup>1</sup> at the end of which time the final assault of the forces of evil should be made against it. When the assault was brought to nothing through God's power, Satan and all who combined with him should be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death, and the blessed reign of the saints should begin with God in heaven. The picture which John presents is somewhat confused. The reign of the saints on earth during the millennial period is not sharply distinguished from their final blessedness in heaven, so that a reader in certain passages cannot feel sure whether reference is being made to the glorified Jerusalem on earth or to the heavenly city of the blessed. Dr. Charles has recently attempted not only to combine the separate elements into a consistent whole, but to offer an explanation of how the confusion came into the picture. Those who are interested will find the question discussed in detail and with full scholarship in the second of his two volumes; and those who find, as I confess to have found, the explanation of the confusion more than a little artificial and therefore difficult to accept, may yet recognise the value of seeing the separate

<sup>1</sup> The number of years appears in the extra-canonical books. Again one can only refer to the way in which the book of *Enoch* dealt with these questions and direct attention to its influence.



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elements sifted out with so much care and set together. It may appear more probable that the confusion was not merely in the manuscripts but in the mind of their writer. The prophet was seeking to combine in his own way two positions which were really incompatible. The Jewish tradition in which he had been trained believed that heaven was God's abode, while the earth had He given to the children of men. Hence the new kingdom was set up on the earth. But Christianity, like *Enoch* before it, broke loose from these limitations. The faithful were to be with Christ, and Christ had departed to the presence of the Father. Where He was, there should also His servants be. The earth ceased to be a needed part of the new universe which arrived in the consummation. The prophet had not clearly thought out the consequences of the Christian attitude, and he accordingly wavers between a kingdom on this side of time and a kingdom beyond time, now using elements true only of the one to describe the other. And, in particular, he found room for the traditional Jewish kingdom on the earth by inserting it before the eternal peace and by making it last for a thousand years.

Is then the Johannine expectation of a millennial advent an essential part of our Christian faith, or is it a merely temporary feature due to the conditions of the particular time in which the prophet lived? Hitherto there have always been bodies of men who have found in the thought of the millennial kingdom some spiritual content and some light on their way: they need nothing to be said to them. But there are others, and probably they are an increasing number, to whom such a thought presents grave difficulty. It forms no real element in their

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personal faith, and yet they have uneasily to recognise that it is present in their Bible. They hardly know how to deal honestly with this part of scripture or how to answer those who press it on their attention. It may be an advantage to them to recognise that the conception is no essential part of their Christian faith, but represents an effort to unite elements of thought which came from Judaism and from Christianity. Now that Christianity has more adequately thought out its own position on the question, the need for retaining the old has passed away.

John was trying to combine the Jewish and the Christian kingdoms of the end. He knew that the Christian conception, because of its deeper sense of the close relations between God and man, was the higher. Accordingly he made it the final and the eternal state. Heaven, not earth, was the ultimate goal of the saints. But he felt compelled to find an uneasy place for the earthly kingdom which he had inherited from the Jewish thought. He made it temporary, but he retained it as real. The position was simply a half-way house between a fully developed, purely Christian view of the future state and the view of a Church which was still struggling out of its Jewish swaddling clothes. Instead of fusing the more primitive thought in the higher, men tried to keep both and unite them in time. What they failed to realise was that by so doing they were still dealing in terms of time, while the consummation was beyond time. Being consummation, it must mean that time was no more.

Does this involve that the insertion of a millennial kingdom was a mere blunder on the part of the prophet, or a clumsy method of uniting incongruous ideas which has only resulted in bringing about confusion? It does

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not seem just to utter so sweeping a verdict. John may have been influenced in clinging to his Jewish tradition, not merely by the fact that it was tradition, but by its having supplied him with ideals which he loved and desired to retain. Now the earthly kingdom of the Jew brought into all ideas about the eternal future an element which Judaism was peculiarly fitted to supply—what may be called the sense of reality. One of the grave risks of the nascent Church was that, growing up in a Greek-speaking environment, it should adopt with its new language the Greek world of thought. And many to-day have been able to insist that it did precisely this thing in its conception of Christ and gave the world a Neo-Platonic *logos* instead of Him who lived among men full of grace and truth. There was the same risk attendant on the ideas about the future. As men learned to believe in the immortality of the soul, there might have come merely the expectation of the soul's continued existence, an existence empty of real content. The Jew, however, had believed, not in the immortality of the soul, but in the resurrection of the life; and he had taught it, not as a natural endowment of the spirit, but as a gift of God. Into this new life, made real in the consummation, was to pass everything which made life worthy and sweet here. It was a life which could be renewed on a renovated earth, and into it were to come and in it were to continue all those things which brought joy to men who lived now in the presence of God. Judaism had never been ashamed of the body. To it the body was no prison-house of clay which cribbed and confined man's spirit, it was the means through which the soul functioned. Body and soul were almost inseparable concomitants. What, then, the body

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made possible for the soul, the sweet intercourse of men, their mutual helpfulness, their kindly courtesies, all the relations which make courage and patience and gentleness and helpfulness realities instead of empty phrases, were assured for continuance in an earthly kingdom. John rescued much for our Christian life, when he refused to break with his Jewish tradition.



## CHAPTER XVII

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WHERE we pass into the abiding thought of the prophet on the great theme of the future and reach his definitely Christian outlook is in the grave sweet utterances which have captured the Church's imagination and stayed the Church's heart through so many generations. Men have puzzled over his picture of the millennial advent and argued about the thousand years' reign of the saints. But instinctively they have taken over the great sentences which utter the prophet's full heart, and made them a permanent inheritance, reading them to their dying and repeating them over their dead.

It is, of course, necessary to remember that John thought in symbols on the subject, as indeed all thought on such a theme must be more or less symbolic. Only the recognition of this character in connection with his utterances ought to remind the reader that he must be at pains to translate the symbols, if he is to do justice to the real content of the ideas. In many of his pictures John has borrowed from the past with an easy liberality, so that much of his imagery is familiar to every Old Testament student and can be interpreted through its original setting. Thus his nightless day is reminiscent of Zechariah, his river of the water of life offers a renewed proof of his fondness for Ezekiel, his tree of life recalls many similar uses

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of the phrase. But here and there he went further afield than the Old Testament for his analogies, and then it becomes necessary again to remember what the Babylonians meant by the great deep, if we are to understand why he counted it a blessing that the sea should be no more. The sea was not our sea, but that chaos which perpetually threatened the divine order ; therefore, when it ceased, the source of all disorder came to an end. Sometimes his descriptions are less happy : I confess that to me the jewelled foundations of the city of God strike an incongruous note. But perhaps, if one sets out to describe the new Jerusalem in full detail, this feature represents the best which can be done, and probably there are many to whom the melodious words, chrysolite and beryl, chalcedony and amethyst, appeal.

As a rule, however, the emblems he has borrowed are taken from the physical world and, as such, are less adequate to describe and represent the fulness of the spiritual change which the world was to undergo. Many of the symbols, on the other hand, which he coined for himself were based on the life of man, not on the life of nature. Anthropomorphism was (and is) the only adequate way in which man could think and speak about the things of God : and no one was surer to recognise it than a prophet who, as a Jew, had believed that man was created in the image of God, and, as a Christian, had learned to believe that man alone among the things of time was counted worthy of the Passion of Christ.

Further, it is in the broad, general effects which he has gained that John was most unerring. Thus the pervading and haunting note of heaven throughout his book is music. It is fortunately less necessary than it once

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may have been to apologise for this particular form for a great thought. The day is past when men count it worth while to declare that they can have no desire for a heaven where the employment of the blessed was conceived to consist in playing on golden harps and singing praise to God without ceasing. It has happily come to be recognised that no one has the right to misunderstand Eastern imagery for the sake of misrepresenting its author. John sees the courts of heaven to be full of activity, for His servants shall serve Him ; but he also sees the courts of heaven to be filled with harmony. It is a world where activity has not ceased, but has increased, because it is all directed to a real end, and above all where weariness and the peevishness of temper bred by weariness have come to an end for ever. "Thou shalt earn thy bread in the sweat of thy brow" was the curse on humanity to the honest-thinking Hebrew. He never forgot what labour for daily bread in this sin-cursed world actually meant : the men who spent their strength on what quickened no imagination nor hope, the overworked, the immature who attempted what was too hard for them, the old who needed to continue what was beyond their strength. When the only motive was to earn thy bread, and when the world knew only this motive, work lay under a curse. But there was work which was in itself a hymn : and it came to the world as a benediction, so soon as His servants served Him. Work did not cease in heaven, only its curse ceased ; it was done and could be done to music.

The blessed praise God day and night without ceasing, not because they do nothing else except sing the new song of the redeemed, but because all they do is fruitful

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and wholesome, and therefore is an offering of thanksgiving to Him who has made it possible by giving them their powers and their sphere. So much of what men do on this side of time consists in pulling down what God desires to build and in building up what God must pull down, and a great part of this mistaken effort is due, not merely to perversity but to ignorance of the true and enduring standards. Much of our human pains is devoted to patching up what has already been almost irrevocably marred in order to make habitable the poor shelter of civilisation which humanity has reared to protect itself against the icy wind from the outer desert. It cannot last beyond the little hour, to meet the needs of which it was framed and it perishes in the using. Much of what men in each generation must employ for the service they fulfil is already outworn and shaken, but is all they have and must be made the best of. Hope and fine energy which might go to enrich a generation must spend themselves in merely clearing the ground before anything can be built at all. So men come wearied and fretted to their real task. On the other side of time, there shall be no waste and heartbreak, because there shall be no futility in the efforts of men. Everything men do shall praise God, who gives the inspiration and the opportunity, in whose service and after whose standard all the work has been undertaken.

Further, in the prophet's vision all men are able to work together and, because their work is animated by a common spirit and serves a common end, there are no discords. In this present world it is far otherwise, for there the discords threaten to drown everything else. Men plan great things like Churches and States, and turn them into



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pettiness through the temper they show to one another. Quarrelling over the hands to which the conduct of their institutions shall be committed, they often forget the end for which these things exist, even the service of humanity. Men conceive noble things, ships and fair cities and the homes of men, which might well be completed amid devout thanksgiving for the grace of being able to plan and permitted to execute such works at all. But that hymn is drowned in the clash of tools flung down in a strike or the clang of the gates at a lock-out. To-day almost the only man who can sing over his labour is the solitary worker, the artist in colour or in words. The redeemed shall sing at their service, though it never comes to an end, because they work together, animated by a common aim. It is said that our modern discords are better than death: that is all which can be said in their favour, they are better than death. The prophet saw a world in which the sign of the new life which men shared was that they sang together while they wrought together, because His servants shall then serve Him and not their own ends.

Through thus laying emphasis on the change which was to be brought about in the relation of man to God, to his fellow-men and to his life-task, the prophet taught that it was primarily a moral regeneration which was needed in order to bring about the new order. Man was to be renewed in the spirit of his mind, and was to find and follow a higher purpose. Here, too, was the fundamental conviction which makes cataclysm and the sudden intervention of God to renew the physical universe no essential part of the apocalyptic scheme of thought. When the Church had ceased to expect a millennial advent and had even surrendered the belief in God's immediate

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act of transformation, it was still able to use and draw inspiration from John's vision of the future world. His words represent great hopes and promises about an ideal future in language which can appeal to and deeply influence untrained minds.

But this does not fully explain their vitality. They have outlived many other similar visions. The world has never lacked ideal representations of a better or a perfect state, and the prophet's description may with a certain justice be classed with these. Yet it can be classed with the others only with a certain reserve, which perhaps offers the primary reason why his description has outlived the others. There have been dreams of a perfect state from the time of Plato's Republic through More's Utopia down to Rousseau and later. And these have appealed to men and do still appeal to men, especially while they are young. But, as men grow old, the kindling of the imagination which the vision once brought often gives place to a certain wistfulness and frequently with more thoughtful men passes into a dull irritation of mind. And that is not merely nor even primarily due to the failure of all such fair visions to materialise themselves or to the dislike of old age to be fretted in its peace: it is rather due to the recognition that they never can be realised in the present condition of things, because every one of them is hopelessly and utterly unreal in itself. No one of them seeks to face the facts, nor seeks to base on things as they are, for they are all founded on a false—not inadequate, but false—conception of human nature. They all agree that human society is deplorably wrong, and, because it is deplorably wrong, is doing grievous hurt to the moral life of man. But they all forget that the human

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societies have been built up by the men who lived in them, and are themselves but the embodiment of men's false standards for life. A new society can only result through the acceptance of better standards.

John's vision is in fundamental agreement with the convictions of Old Testament prophecy. The prophets were not social reformers in the sense of believing that a new system of society was all which was necessary to save the world. They came, not with a new social order, but with a social ethic based on the divine standards for life. Till there were different men, there could not be a regenerated world. The perfect society could only arise among, it could only be welcome to, and therefore it could only hope to continue with, the men who accepted different values for their own conduct and higher aims for their own life. Humanity needed first to believe in the ends of God for it. Until it could find a worthy and a common aim, it could not build even a shed to keep out the rain, far less the city of God. So long as men served their own interests, they would seek to build up a society that was able to serve their own interests ; and so long the clash of the warring interests should bring discord and failure into their noblest efforts. The right end must first be found and loved.

And John had seen more than the prophets, for he had seen Jesus. In Him and in His life and work he believed he saw the end of God for humanity and for each soul of man. John knew that Jesus did not begin His work at the circumference, but at the centre. He forced back on the soul of each man the ultimate moral questions about which we all dimly and uneasily know that, until they have been answered, nothing has even been begun. He



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compelled every man to begin with himself and to decide as to where his ultimate allegiance was being given. He urged on each man's attention the decision as to what he for himself held to be the final realities and values. John knew that only the men who had answered these questions could endure the society of Jesus even for a day, and he had told the Christians in the seven Churches to decide in the hour of test whether they could welcome the Master, when He came knocking at their door. Only if they could submit to His standards, could they build up and rejoice in the city of God.

John knew also the liberty and content of heart which came from acceptance of the end of the Lord for him. He knew that, when a man ceased from his evasions and faced the ultimate moral issues which Christ presented to him, he passed into freedom. Here too the phrases which chime like music out of the pages of the book of Revelation preserve, not by any patched addition but in their essential features, the real content of the Old Testament thought. Occupying the same fundamental standpoint, they continue and fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the past. Men had dared to believe that this world with all it holds of good and evil, of joy and pain, was but the scene on which the souls of men won through to victory or stumbled down to utter defeat. The whole pageantry of earth was set to serve the resolute soul and to render it up with its individual contribution wrested from the world through its personal faith. The world was the sphere God had chosen in which to test and temper the spirits of men in whom and in whose patience He had His joy. When once men believed that, as they began to learn it in Judaism and as they all afresh realised it in Christ, the world fell from them and they were



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made free. And the consummation could only be the free glad lives of men who are beyond fear and hate and sorrow and care, because they have discovered that their God supplies all their need, and because they know that they cannot be where He is not. "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The scenes through which the prophet has himself been wandering and has carried his readers, scenes in which he has dealt with kingdoms and their changing fate or systems with their uncertain promise and their certain fall, only make the issue more dramatic and more sharply defined. The end of the weird beasts and the dragon and the trumpeting angels, the issue of the long travail of time shall be souls of men who have learned to rest in God and be satisfied with Him. The prophet knew it was these his Lord loved and for these He died. The kingdoms of this world have been the expression of the effort of men to say what they believed and make permanent the things they valued most. The systems have been built up to embody what men thought and keenly believed in. The world, as God suffered it to be, has tested them and thrown them into confusion and ruinous heaps, only to rise again in a different form. But, when these have finished all their task and are finally swept aside, there shall remain the free spirits who learned from success and failure, from discipline and disappointment, to trust God utterly. And they shall be well content, for they shall be with Him.

One cannot be too grateful for the existence of the

## The End

New Testament and for the fact that the Church catholic has continued the practice of having it read at all its public services. All its writers believe, and each of them proclaims it in his own way, that, when God is finished with His world and it draws down to its end, there shall be left the soul and God. Because the New Testament never shrinks from proclaiming this faith, it has kept the spirit of man from being overwhelmed by the deafening machine of the world and has maintained its self-respect. It has forced men back on the ultimate questions of personal responsibility and personal duty, which all of us gladly evade, yet about which we all know that, until we have answered them, we have done nothing real. It saves the soul by the healing balm of the message that Jesus Christ died for it.

The modern world is apt to take a different attitude and to think of most things in terms of bulk. Many a man cannot help being cowed by the sense of his personal insignificance in comparison with the "forces" and the "movements" about which he hears, and by which he has only too good reason to know that he is being borne along. And, when he is told that these forces and movements need to be made Christian or set on a spiritual basis, he is only more bewildered, because no real suggestion is offered as to how meantime he is to live. We are all neatly classified and docketed. Appeals are addressed to us as consumers or as producers, though we strongly suspect that we are both. Warnings are addressed to capital about the aims of labour, and to labour that it should utterly distrust capital. Again most of us are painfully conscious that we have a foot in each camp. The world is full of "movements" and "tendencies" and "forces" and "classes," large vague

## Visions of the End

entities which make the individual negligible. He is merely being borne along by this "force," and is sharing in that "tendency" and is involved in the fate of a "class." But no one troubles to tell him what shall be his life and what shall be its end. He himself counts for nothing.

It gives such a man a singular sense of self-respect to read his New Testament and to hear how quietly Jesus Christ tells him that he counts to God. It makes him able to draw an ampler breath and to steady himself, when he reads that, when the riot of the clashing interests of the world has died down and the world itself has sunk in night, every one of us shall give account of himself before God. The faith of the New Testament, because it sets as the final end a kingdom to which men have freedom of entry on the ground that they have accepted and lived by the divine standards, because it holds to the ultimate worth of the soul, saves the soul.

The Church has at times shown itself not unwilling to take the broader view of its function which it has learned from the world. Then the Church has begun to summon conferences and to propound programmes. Its services too have become rather tuned to the note of public meetings; and there has been much talk of the attitude of the Church to certain things. Then it became a blessed relief for simple people to hear the authentic voice of the New Testament read continually at public worship. For there they heard how Jesus seemed first to be engrossed with the case of the individual. He went from place to place, touching one here, claiming another there, lifting them out of the stream of the world, and setting them face to face with the questions which they had so long and with such indifferent success been seeking to evade. And, when they

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were forced to answer them because of His immitigable insistence, they found themselves, and their liberty and their peace in God's will. With such steady and urgent patience had He done His work that His prophet could speak of the lives of men as what was to outlast the mutable world in which they found their temporary abiding-place and to pass on to their end in God. So believing, men were set beyond the waste of time, the wreck of hope, the disillusion and heartbreak of outward things. They were enabled to expect a city where the soul received its true place, and in this expectation they turned, God's redeemed men, to fulfil their work with a quiet and untroubled heart, because the fashion of this world passeth away.



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